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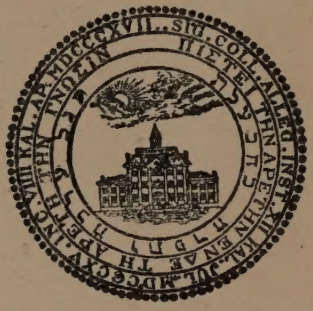

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WITHDRAWN

"As they had finished dinner, they strolled again up the Boulevard."

—Strong as Death, p. 131.

JAS. E. RICHMOND,

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THE MIROMESNIL EDITION
OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

STRONG AS DEATH

USELESS BEAUTY

WHO KNOWS?

AND OTHER STORIES

Translated by
A. E. HENDERSON, B. A.
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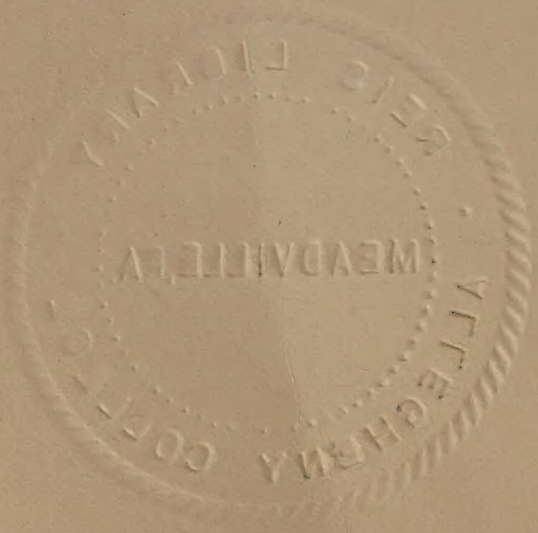

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STRONG AS DEATH

PART I

CHAPTER I

A DUEL OF HEARTS

BROAD daylight streamed down into the vast studio through a skylight in the ceiling, which showed a large square of dazzling blue, a bright vista of limitless heights of azure, across which passed flocks of birds in rapid flight. But the glad light of heaven hardly entered this severe room, with high ceilings and draped walls, before it began to grow soft and dim, to slumber among the hangings and die in the portières, hardly penetrating to the dark corners where the gilded frames of portraits gleamed like flame. Peace and sleep seemed imprisoned there, the peace characteristic of an artist's dwelling, where the human soul has toiled. Within these walls, where thought abides, struggles, and becomes exhausted in its violent efforts, everything appears weary and overcome as soon as the energy of action is abated; all seems dead after the great crises of life, and the furniture, the hangings, and the portraits of great personages still unfinished on the canvases, all seem to rest as if the whole place had suffered the master's fatigue and

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had toiled with him, taking part in the daily renewal of his struggle. A vague, heavy odor of paint, turpentine and tobacco was in the air, clinging to the rugs and chairs; and no sound broke the deep silence save the sharp, short cries of the swallows that flitted above the open skylight, and the dull, ceaseless roar of Paris, hardly heard above the roofs. Nothing moved except a little cloud of smoke that rose intermittently toward the ceiling with every puff that Olivier Bertin, lying upon his divan, blew slowly from a cigarette between his lips.

With gaze lost in the distant sky, he tried to think of a new subject for a painting. What should he do? As yet he did not know. He was by no means resolute and sure of himself as an artist, but was of an uncertain, restless disposition, his inspiration always hesitating as to the line of art it should follow. Rich, illusrious, the gainer of all honors, he nevertheless remained, in these his later years, a man who did not know exactly toward what ideal he had been aiming. He had won the *Prix de Rome,* had been the defender of traditions, and had evoked, like so many others, the great scenes of history; then, modernizing his tendencies, he had painted living men, but in a way that showed the influence of classic memories. Intelligent, enthusiastic, a worker that clung to his changing dreams, in love with his art, which he knew to perfection, he had acquired, thanks to his subtle intelligence, remarkable skill and great versatility, due in some degree to his indecision and his experiments in all directions of art. Perhaps, too, the sudden admiration of the world for his works, elegant, correct, and full of distinction, influenced his character and pre-

vented him from becoming what he naturally might have been. Since the triumph of his first success, the desire to please was always foremost, without his being conscious of it; it influenced his actions and weakened his convictions. This desire to please was also apparent in him in many ways, and had contributed much to his fame.

His grace of manner, all his habits of life, the care he devoted to his person, his long-standing reputation for strength and agility as a swordsman and an equestrian, had added further attraction to his steadily growing fame. After his *Cléopatra,* the first canvas that made him illustrious, Paris suddenly became enamored of him, adopted him, made a pet of him; and all at once he became one of those brilliant, fashionable artists one meets in the Bois, for whose presence hostesses manœuver, and whom the Institute welcomes thenceforth. He had entered it as a conqueror, with the approval of all Paris.

Thus Fortune had led him to the beginning of old age, coddling and caressing him.

Under the influence of the beautiful day, which he knew was glowing without, Bertin sought a poetic subject. He felt somewhat dreamy, however, after his breakfast and his cigarette; he pondered awhile, gazing into space, in fancy sketching rapidly against the blue sky the figures of graceful women in the Bois or on the sidewalk of a street, lovers by the water—all the pleasing fancies in which his thoughts revelled. The changing images stood out against the bright sky, vague and fleeting in his illusive vision, while the swallows, darting through space in ceaseless flight, seemed trying to efface them as if with strokes of a pen.

He found nothing. All these half-seen visions resembled things that he had already done; all the women appeared to be the daughters or the sisters of those that had already been born of his artistic fancy; and the vague fear, that had haunted him for a year, that he had lost the power to create, had made the round of all subjects and exhausted his inspiration, outlined itself distinctly before this review of his work—this lack of power to dream anew, to discover the unknown.

He arose quietly to look among his unfinished sketches, hoping to find something that would inspire him with a new idea.

Still puffing at his cigarette, he proceeded to turn over the sketches, drawings and rough drafts that he kept in a large old closet; but, soon becoming disgusted with this vain quest, and feeling depressed by fatigue, he tossed away his cigarette, whistled a popular street-song, and bent down and picked up a heavy dumb-bell that lay under a chair. Having raised with the other hand a curtain that draped a mirror which served him in judging the accuracy of a pose, in verifying his perspectives and testing the reality, he placed himself in front of it and began to swing the dumb-bell, meanwhile looking intently at himself.

He had been celebrated in the studios for his strength; then, in the gay world, for his good looks. But now the weight of years was making him heavy. Tall, with broad shoulders and full chest, he had acquired the paunch of an old wrestler, although he kept up his fencing every day and rode his horse with assiduity. His head was still remarkable and as handsome as ever, although in a style different

from that of his earlier days. His thick, short white hair set off his black eyes beneath heavy gray eyebrows, while his luxuriant mustache—the mustache of an old soldier—had remained quite dark, and it gave to his countenance a rare characteristic of energy and pride.

Standing before the mirror, with heels together and body erect, he went through the usual movements with the two iron balls, which he held out at the end of his muscular arm, watching with a complacent expression its evidence of quiet power.

But suddenly, in the glass, which reflected the whole studio, he saw one of the portières move; then appeared a woman's head—only a head, peeping in. A voice behind him asked:

"Anyone here?"

"Present!" he responded promptly, turning round. Then, throwing his dumb-bell on the floor, he hastened toward the door with an appearance of youthful agility that was slightly affected.

A woman entered attired in a light summer costume. They shook hands.

"You were exercising, I see," said the lady.

"Yes," he replied; "I was playing peacock, and allowed myself to be surprised."

The lady laughed, and continued:

"Your concierge's lodge was vacant, and as I know you are always alone at this hour, I came up without being announced."

He looked at her.

"Heavens, how beautiful you are! What *chic!*"

"Yes, I have a new frock. Do you think it pretty?"

"Charming, and perfectly harmonious. We can

certainly say that nowadays we understand shades of color."

He walked round her, gently touching the material of the gown, adjusting its folds with the tips of his fingers, like a man that knows a woman's toilet as the modiste knows it, having all his life employed his artist's mind and his athlete's muscles in depicting with slender brush changing and delicate fashions, in revealing feminine grace enclosed within a prison of velvet and silk, or hidden by snowy laces. He finished his scrutiny by declaring: "It is a great success, and it becomes you perfectly!"

The lady allowed herself to be admired, quite content to be pretty and to please him.

No longer in her first youth, but still beautiful, not very tall, somewhat plump, but with that freshness which lends to a woman of forty an appearance of having only just reached full maturity, she seemed like one of those roses that flourish for an indefinite time up to the moment when, in too full a bloom, they fall in an hour.

Beneath her blonde hair she possessed all the alert and youthful grace of those Parisian women who never grow old; who carry within themselves a surprising vital force, an indomitable power of resistance, and who remain for twenty years triumphant and indestructible, careful above all things of their bodies and ever watchful of their health.

She raised her veil and murmured:

"Well, you do not kiss me!"

"I have been smoking."

"Pooh!" said the lady. Then, holding up her face, she added, "So much the worse!"

Their lips met.

He took her parasol and divested her of her spring jacket with a readiness and skill that showed he was accustomed to doing it. As she seated herself on the divan, he asked with an air of interest:

"Is your husband well?"

"Very well; he must be making a speech in the House at this very moment."

"Ah! On what subject?"

"Oh—no doubt on beets or on colza oil, as usual!"

Her husband, the Comte de Guilleroy, deputy from the Eure, made a special study of all questions of agricultural interest.

Perceiving in one corner a sketch that she did not recognize, the lady walked across the studio, asking, "What is that?"

"A pastel that I have just begun—the portrait of the Princesse de Pontève."

"You know," said the lady gravely, "that if you go back to painting portraits of women I shall close your studio. I know only too well to what that sort of thing leads!"

"Oh, one does not make a portrait of Any more than once!" was the answer.

"I hope not, indeed!"

She examined the newly begun pastel sketch with the air of a woman that understands the technic of art. She stepped back, advanced, made a shade of her hand, sought the place where the best light fell on the sketch, and finally expressed her satisfaction.

"It is very good. You succeed admirably with pastel work."

"Do you think so?" murmured the flattered artist.

"Yes; it is a most delicate art, needing great distinction of style. It cannot be handled by masons in the art of painting."

For twelve years the countess had encouraged the painter's leaning toward the distinguished in art, opposing his occasional return to the simplicity of realism; and, in consideration of the demands of fashionable modern elegance, she had tenderly urged him toward an ideal of grace that was slightly affected and artificial.

"What is the princess like?" she asked.

He was compelled to give her all sorts of details —those minute details in which the jealous and subtle curiosity of women delights, passing from remarks upon her toilet to criticisms of her intelligence.

Suddenly she inquired: "Does she flirt with you?"

He laughed, and declared that she did not.

Then, putting both hands on the shoulders of the painter, the countess gazed fixedly at him. The ardor of her questioning look caused a quiver in the pupils of her blue eyes, flecked with almost imperceptible black points, like tiny ink-spots.

Again she murmured: "Truly, now, she is not a flirt?"

"No, indeed, I assure you!"

"Well, I do not worry, anyway," said the countess. "You never will love anyone but me now. It is all over for the others. It is too late, my poor dear!"

The painter experienced that slight painful emotion which touches the heart of middle-aged men when some one mentions their age; and he mur-

mured: "To-day and to-morrow, as yesterday, there never has been in my life, and never will be, any one but you, Any."

She took him by the arm, and turning again toward the divan, made him sit beside her.

"Of what were you thinking?" she asked.

"I am looking for a subject to paint."

"What, pray?"

"I don't know, you see, since I am still seeking it."

"What have you been doing lately?"

He was obliged to tell her of all the visits he had received, about all the dinners and *soirées* he had attended, and to repeat all the conversations and chit-chat. Both were really interested in all these futile and familiar details of fashionable life. The little rivalries, the flirtations, either well known or suspected, the ready-made criticisms of the same persons, heard and repeated a thousand times, the same events and opinions, were bearing away and drowning both their minds in that troubled and agitated stream called Parisian life. Knowing everyone in all classes of society, as an artist to whom all doors were open, she as the elegant wife of a Conservative deputy, they were experts in that sport of brilliant French chatter, amiably satirical, trivial, brilliant but flippant, a certain shibboleth which gives a particular and greatly envied reputation to those whose tongues have become supple in this sort of malicious small talk.

"When are you coming to dine?" she asked suddenly.

"Whenever you wish. Name your day."

"Friday. I shall have the Duchesse de Morte-

main, the Corbelles, and Musadieu, in honor of my daughter's return—she is coming this evening. But do not speak of it, my friend. It is a secret."

"Oh, yes, I accept. I shall be charmed to see Annette again. I have not seen her in three years."

"Yes, that is true. Three years!"

Though Annette, in her earliest years, had been brought up in Paris in her parents' home, she had become the object of the last and passionate affection of her grandmother, Madame Paradin, who, almost blind, lived all the year round on her son-in-law's estate at the castle of Roncières, on the Eure. Little by little, the old lady had kept the child with her more and more, and as the Guilleroys passed almost half their time in this domain, to which a variety of interests, agricultural and political, called them frequently, it ended in taking the little girl to Paris on occasional visits, for she herself preferred the free and active life of the country to the cloistered life of the city.

For three years she had not visited Paris even once, the countess having preferred to keep her entirely away from it, in order that a new taste for its gaieties should not be awakened in her before the day fixed for her début in society. Madame de Guilleroy had given her in the country two governesses, with unexceptionable diplomas, and had visited her mother and her daughter more frequently than before. Moreover, Annette's residence at the château was rendered almost necessary by the presence of the old lady.

Formerly, Olivier Bertin had passed six weeks or two months at Roncières every year; but in the past three years rheumatism had sent him to water-

ing-places at some distance, and these had so revived his love for Paris that after his return he could not bring himself to leave it.

The young girl, according to the agreement, should not have returned home until autumn, but her father had suddenly conceived a plan for her marriage, and sent for her that she might meet immediately the Marquis de Farandal, to whom he wished her to be betrothed. But this plan was kept quite secret, and Madame de Guilleroy had told only Olivier Bertin of it, in strict confidence.

"Then your husband has quite decided upon it?" said he at last.

"Yes; I even think it a very good idea."

Then they talked of other things.

She returned to the subject of painting, and wished to make him decide to paint a Christ. He opposed the suggestion, thinking that there was already enough of them in the world; but she persisted, and grew impatient in her argument.

"Oh, if I knew how to draw I would give you my impression: it should be very new, very bold. They are taking Him down from the cross, and the man who has detached the hands has let drop the whole upper part of the body. It has fallen upon the crowd below, and they lift their arms to receive and sustain it. Do you understand?"

Yes, he understood; he even thought the conception quite original; but he was just now in a modern vein, and as his fair friend reclined upon the divan, with one daintily-shod foot peeping out, the skin gleaming through the almost transparent stocking, he said: "Ah, that is what we should paint! That is life—a woman's foot at the edge of her

skirt! Into that subject one may put everything—truth, desire, poetry. Nothing is more graceful or more charming than a woman's foot; and what mystery it suggests: the hidden limb, lost yet imagined beneath its veiling folds of drapery!"

"Isn't that elegant, distinguished, and expressive—more expressive than the hand? Show me your hand, Any!"

She wore long gloves reaching to the elbow. In order to remove one she took it by the upper edge and slipped it down quickly. The arm appeared, white, plump, round, so suddenly bared as to produce an idea of complete and bold nudity.

She held out her hand, which drooped from the wrist. The rings sparkled on her white fingers, and the narrow pink nails seemed like amorous claws protruding at the tips of that little feminine paw.

Olivier Bertin handled it tenderly and admiringly. He played with the fingers as if they were live toys, while saying:

"What a strange thing! What a strange thing! What a pretty little member, intelligent and adroit, which makes whatever one wills—books, laces, houses, pyramids, locomotives, pastry, or gives caresses, which last is its pleasantest function."

He drew off the rings one by one, and as the wedding-ring fell in its turn, he murmured smilingly:

"The law! Let us salute it!"

"Nonsense!" said the countess, slightly wounded.

Bertin had always been inclined to satirical banter, that tendency of the French to mingle irony with the most serious sentiments, and he had often unintentionally made her sad, without knowing how

to understand the subtle distinctions of women, or to discern the border of sacred ground, as he himself said. Above all things it vexed her whenever he alluded with a touch of familiar lightness to their friendship, which was an affair of such long standing that he declared it the most beautiful example of love in the nineteenth century. After a silence, she inquired:

"Will you take Annette and me to the varnishing-day reception?"

"Certainly."

Then she asked him about the best pictures to be shown at the next exposition, which was to open in a fortnight.

Suddenly, however, she appeared to recollect something she had forgotten.

"Come, give me my things," she said. "I am going now."

And, rising, she approached the table, on which were scattered papers, open letters, old and recent, beside a painter's inkstand, in which the ink had dried. She looked at it all with curiosity, touched the papers, and lifted them to look underneath.

Bertin approached her, saying:

"You will disarrange my disorder."

Without replying to this, she inquired:

"Who is the gentlemen that wishes to buy your *Baigneuses?*"

"An American whom I do not know."

"Have you come to an agreement about the *Chanteuse des rues?*"

"Yes. Ten thousand."

"You did well. It was pretty, but not exceptional. Good-by, dear."

She presented her cheek, which he brushed with a calm kiss; then she disappeared through the portières, saying in an undertone:

"Friday—eight o'clock. I do not wish you to go with me to the door—you know that very well. Good-by!"

When she had gone he first lighted another cigarette, then he began to pace slowly to and fro in his studio. All the past of this friendship unfolded itself before him. He recalled all its details, now long remote, sought them and put them together, interested in this solitary pursuit of reminiscences.

It was at the moment when he had just risen like a star on the horizon of artistic Paris, when the painters were monopolizing the favor of the public, and had built up a quarter with magnificent dwellings, earned by a few strokes of the brush.

After his return from Rome, in 1864, he had lived for some years without success or renown; then suddenly, in 1868, he exhibited his *Cleopatra,* and in a few days was being praised to the skies by both critics and public.

In 1872, after the war, and after the death of Henri Regnault had made a sort of pedestal of glory for all his fellow artists, a *Jocaste,* a bold subject, classed Bertin among the daring, although his wisely original execution made him acceptable even to the Academicians. In 1873 a first medal placed him beyond competition with his *Juive d'Alger,* which he exhibited on his return from a trip to Africa, and a portrait of the Princesse de Salia, in 1874, gave him a place in the fashionable world as the first portrait painter of his day. From that time he became the favorite painter of Parisian women

of that class, the most skilful and ingenious interpreter of their grace, their bearing, and their nature. In a few months all the distinguished women in Paris solicited the favor of being reproduced by his brush. He was hard to please, and made them pay well for that favor.

After he had become the rage, and was received everywhere as a man of the world, he saw one day, at the Duchesse de Mortemain's house, a young woman in deep mourning, who was just leaving as he entered, and who, in this chance meeting in a doorway, dazzled him with a charming vision of grace and elegance.

On inquiring her name, he learned that she was the Comtesse de Guilleroy, wife of a Normandy country squire, agriculturist and deputy; that she was in mourning for her husband's father; and that she was very intellectual, greatly admired, and much sought after.

Struck by the apparition that had delighted his artist's eye, he said:

"Ah, there is some one whose portrait I should paint willingly!"

This remark was repeated to the young countess the next day, and that evening Bertin received a little blue-tinted note, delicately perfumed, in a small, regular handwriting, slanting a little from left to right, which said:

MONSIEUR: The Duchesse de Mortemain, who has just left my house, has assured me that you would be disposed to make, from my poor face, one of your masterpieces. I would entrust it to you willingly if I were certain that you did not speak idly, and that you really see in me something that you could reproduce and idealize.

Accept, Monsieur, my sincere regards.

ANNE DE GUILLEROY.

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He answered this note, asking when he might present himself at the countess' house, and received an unceremonious invitation to breakfast on the following Monday.

It was on the first floor of a large and luxurious modern house in the Boulevard Malesherbes. Passing through a large salon with blue silk walls, framed in white and gold, the painter was shown into a sort of boudoir hung with tapestries of the last century, light and coquettish, those tapestries *à la Watteau*, with their dainty coloring and graceful figures, which seem to have been designed and executed by workmen dreaming of love.

He had just seated himself when the countess appeared. She walked so lightly that he had not heard her coming through the next room and was surprised when he saw her. She extended her hand in graceful welcome.

"And so it is true," said she, "that you really wish to paint my portrait?"

"I shall be very happy to do so, madame."

Her close-fitting black gown made her look very slender and very youthful, though it gave her a serious air, which was belied, however, by her smiling face, lighted up by her bright golden hair. The count entered, leading by the hand a little six-year-old girl.

Madame de Guilleroy presented him, saying, "My husband."

The count was rather short and wore no mustache. His cheeks were hollow, with a bluish tint from his close-shaven beard. He had somewhat the appearance of a priest or an actor. His hair was long and was tossed back carelessly; his manner was polished,

and around the mouth two large circular lines extended from the cheeks to the chin, seeming to have been acquired from the habit of speaking in public.

He thanked the painter with a flourish of phrases that betrayed the orator. He had wished for a long time to have a portrait of his wife, and certainly he would have chosen M. Olivier Bertin, had he not feared a refusal, for he well knew that the painter was overwhelmed with orders.

It was arranged, then, with much ceremony on both sides, that the count should accompany the countess to the studio the next day. He asked, however, whether it would not be better to wait, because of the countess' deep mourning; but the painter declared that he wished to portray the first impression she had made upon him and the striking contrast of her animated, delicate head, luminous under the golden hair, with the austere black of her garments.

She came, then, the following day with her husband, and afterward with her daughter, whom the artist seated before a table covered with picture-books.

Olivier Bertin, following his usual custom, showed himself very reserved. Fashionable women made him a little uneasy, for he hardly knew them. He supposed them to be at once immoral and shallow, hypocritical and dangerous, frivolous and in the way. Among the women of the *demi-monde* he had had some passing adventures due to his renown, his lively wit, his elegant and athletic figure and his dark and animated face. He preferred them, too; he liked their free ways and frank speech, accustomed as he was to the gay and easy manners of the

studios and green-rooms he frequented. He went into the fashionable world for the sake of fame, not because he cared for it; it gratified his vanity. He received congratulations and commissions and played the gallant to charming ladies who flattered him, but he never paid court to any of them. As he did not allow himself to indulge in daring pleasantries and spicy jests in their society, he thought them all prudes, and himself was considered as having good taste. Whenever one of them came to pose at his studio, he felt, in spite of any advances she might make to please him, that disparity of rank which prevents any real unity between artists and fashionable people, no matter how much they may be thrown together. Behind the smiles and the admiration which among women are always a little artificial, he felt the indefinable mental reserve of the being that judges itself of superior essence. This roused in him a little feeling of pride, which showed itself in a bearing of almost haughty respect, dissembling the vanity of the *parvenu* who is treated as an equal by princes and princesses, who owes to his talent the honor accorded to others through their birth. People remarked in a slightly surprised tone: "He is really very well bred!" This surprise, although it flattered him, also wounded him, for it indicated a certain social barrier.

The admirable and ceremonious gravity of the painter a little annoyed Madame de Guilleroy, who could find nothing to say to this distant-mannered man, who yet had a reputation for cleverness.

After settling her little daughter, she would come and sit in an armchair near the newly begun sketch,

and try, according to the artist's directions, to give some expression to her physiognomy.

In the midst of the fourth sitting he suddenly ceased painting and inquired:

"What amuses you more than anything else in life?"

She appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"Why, I hardly know. Why this question?"

"I need a happy thought in those eyes, and I have not seen it yet."

"Well, try to make me talk; I love to chat."

"Are you cheerful?"

"Very cheerful."

"Well, then, let us chat, madame."

He had said "Let us chat, madame" in a very grave tone. Then, resuming his painting, he touched upon a variety of subjects, seeking something on which their minds could meet. They began by exchanging observations on the people that both knew. Then they talked of themselves—always the most agreeable and fascinating subject for a chat.

When they met again the next day they felt more at ease, and Bertin, noting that he pleased and amused her, began to relate some of the details of his artist life, allowing himself to give free scope to his reminiscences in a fanciful way that was peculiar to him.

Accustomed to the dignified presence of the literary lights of the salons, the countess was surprised at this almost unrestrained animation which touched on subjects so plainly and with a touch of satire, and presently she began to answer in the same way, with a grace at once daring and delicate.

In a week's time she had conquered and charmed

him by her good humor, frankness and simplicity. He had entirely forgotten his prejudice against fashionable women and would willingly have declared that they alone had charm and fascination. As he painted, standing before his canvas, advancing and retreating, with the movements of a man fighting, he allowed his fancy to flow freely, as if he had long known this pretty woman, blonde and black, made of sunlight and mourning, seated before him, laughing and listening, answering him gaily with so much animation that she lost her pose every moment.

Sometimes he would move far away from her, closing one eye, leaning over her for a searching study of his model's pose. Then he would draw very near to her for the slightest shadows of her face, to catch the most fleeting expression, to seize and reproduce that which is in a woman's face beyond its mere outward appearance; that emanation of ideal beauty, that reflection of something indescribable, that personal and intimate charm peculiar to each, which causes her to be loved to distraction by one and not by another.

One afternoon the little girl came and stood before the canvas and asked with childish gravity:

"That is mamma, isn't it?"

The artist took her in his arms to kiss her, flattered by that naïve homage to the truth of the likeness.

Another day, when she had been very quiet, they suddenly heard her say in a sad little voice:

"Mamma, I am so tired of this!"

The painter was so touched by this first complaint that he ordered a shopful of toys to be brought to the studio the following day.

Little Annette, astonished, pleased and always thoughtful, put them in order with great care, that she might play with them one after another, according to the desire of the moment. From the date of this gift she loved the painter as little children love, with that caressing, animal-like affection which makes them so sweet and captivating.

Madame de Guilleroy began to take pleasure in the sittings. She was almost without amusement or occupation that winter, as she was in mourning; so that, for lack of society and entertainments, her chief interest was within the walls of Bertin's studio.

She was the daughter of a rich and hospitable Parisian merchant, who had died several years earlier, and of his ailing wife, whose lack of health kept her in bed six months out of the twelve; and while still very young she had become a perfect hostess, knowing how to receive, to smile, to chat, to estimate character and how to adapt herself to every one, perfectly at her ease in society and always far-seeing and adaptable. When the Comte de Guilleroy was presented to her as her betrothed, she understood at once the advantages to be gained by such a marriage, and, like a sensible girl, admitted them without constraint, knowing well that one cannot have everything and that in every situation we must strike a balance between good and bad.

Launched in the world, much sought after because of her beauty and brilliance, she was admired and courted by many men without ever feeling the least quickening of her heart, which was as sensible as her mind.

She was something of a flirt, however, in a discreet, aggressive way, which never went beyond

bounds. Compliments pleased her, awakened desires, fed her vanity, provided she might seem to ignore them; and when she had received for a whole evening the incense of this sort of homage, she slept quietly, as a woman who has accomplished her mission on earth. This existence, which lasted seven years, did not weary her nor seem monotonous, for she adored the incessant excitement of society, but sometimes she felt that she desired something different. The men of her world, lawyer politicians, financiers or wealthy idlers, amused her as actors might; she did not take them too seriously, although she appreciated their functions, their stations and their titles.

The painter pleased her at first because such a man was an absolute novelty to her. She found the studio a very amusing place, laughed gaily, felt that she, too, was clever, and was grateful to him for the pleasure she took in the sittings. He pleased her, too, because he was handsome, strong and famous; no woman, whatever she may pretend, being indifferent to physical beauty and glory. Flattered at having been admired by this genius, and disposed, on her side, to think well of him, she had discovered in him an alert and cultivated mind, delicacy, fancy, the true charm of intelligence and an eloquence of expression that seemed to illumine whatever he said.

A rapid friendship sprang up between them, and the hand-clasp exchanged every day as she entered seemed more and more to express something of the feeling in their hearts.

Then, without deliberate design, with no definite determination, she felt within her heart a growing desire to fascinate him, and yielded to it. She had

foreseen nothing, planned nothing; she was only coquettish with added grace, as a woman always is toward a man who pleases her more than all others; and in her manner with him, in her glances and smiles was that seductive charm that diffuses itself around a woman in whose breast has awakened the need of being loved.

She said flattering things to him which meant "I find you very agreeable, monsieur"; and she made him talk at length in order to show him, by her attention, how much he aroused her interest. He would cease to paint and sit beside her, and in that mental exaltation due to an intense desire to please he had crises of poetry, of gaiety or of philosophy, according to his state of mind that day.

She was merry when he was gay; when he became profound she tried to follow his ideas, though she did not always succeed; and when her mind wandered to other things, she appeared to listen with so perfect an air of comprehension and such apparent enjoyment of his remarks that he became enthused as he noted her attention to his words and was touched at having discovered a mind so delicate, open and docile into which thought fell like a seed.

The portrait progressed and was likely to be good, for the painter had reached the state of emotion that is necessary in order to discover all the qualities of his model and to express them with that convincing ardor which is the inspiration of true artists.

Leaning toward her, watching every movement of her face, all the tints of her flesh, every shadow of her skin, all the expression and the translucence of her eyes, every secret of her physiognomy, he had

become saturated with her personality as a sponge absorbs water; and, in transferring to canvas that emanation of disturbing charm which his eye seized and which flowed like a wave from his thought to his brush, he was overcome and intoxicated by it, as if he had drunk deep of the beauty of woman.

She felt that he was drawn toward her and was amused at this game, this victory that was becoming more and more certain, and became interested.

A new feeling gave fresh piquancy to her existence, awakening in her a mysterious joy. When she heard him spoken of her heart throbbed faster and she longed to say—a longing that never rose to her lips—"He is in love with me!" She was glad when people praised his talent and perhaps was even more pleased when she heard him called handsome. When she was alone, thinking of him, with no indiscreet person at hand, she really imagined that in him she had found merely a good friend, one that would always remain content with a cordial hand-clasp.

Often, in the midst of a sitting, he would suddenly put down his palette on the stool and take little Annette in his arms, kissing her tenderly on her hair, and his eyes, while gazing at the mother, said, "It is you, not the child, that I kiss in this way."

Occasionally Madame de Guilleroy did not bring her daughter, but came alone. On these days he worked very little, and the time was spent in talking.

One afternoon she was late. It was a cold day toward the end of February. Olivier had come in early, as was now his habit whenever she had an appointment with him, for he always hoped she would arrive before the usual hour. While waiting

he paced to and fro, smoking, and asking himself the question that he was surprised to find himself asking for the hundredth time that week: "Am I in love?" He did not know, never having been really in love. He had had his caprices, certainly, some of which had lasted a long time, but never had he mistaken them for love. To-day he was astonished at the emotion that possessed him.

Did he love her? Heretofore, as soon as a woman attracted him he had desired to make a conquest of her, and had held out his hand toward her as if to gather fruit, but without feeling his heart affected profoundly by either her presence or her absence.

Olivier had believed that love began with reveries and with poetic exaltations. But his feeling, on the contrary, seemed to come from an indefinable emotion, more physical than mental. He was nervous and restless, as if under the shadow of threatening illness, though nothing painful entered into this fever of the blood which imparted its contagion to his mind also. He was quite aware that Madame de Guilleroy was the cause of his agitation; that it was due to the memories she left with him and to the expectation of her return. He did not feel drawn to her by an impulse of his whole being, but he felt her always near him, as if she never had left him; she left him something of herself when she departed —something subtle and inexpressible. What was it? Was it love? He probed deep in his heart in order to see, to understand. He thought her charming, but she was not at all the type of ideal woman that his blind hope had created. When love appeals to any one he has always had a vision of the moral traits and physical charms of her who will enslave

him; and Madame de Guilleroy, although she pleased him infinitely, did not appear to him to be that woman.

But why did she thus occupy his thought incessantly, above all others, and in such a different way? Had he simply fallen into the trap set by her coquetry, which he had long suspected and understood and, circumvented by her methods, was he now under the influence of that special fascination which gives to women the desire to please?

He paced here and there, sat down, sprang up, lighted cigarettes and threw them away, and his eyes every instant looked at the clock, whose hands moved toward the usual hour in slow, unhurried fashion.

Several times already he had almost raised the convex glass over the two golden arrows turning so slowly, in order to push the larger one on toward the figure it was approaching so lazily. It seemed to him that this would suffice to make the door open, and that the expected one would appear, deceived and brought to him by this ruse. Then he smiled at this childish, persistent and unreasonable desire.

At last he asked himself this question, "Could I make love to her?" This idea seemed strange to him, indeed hardly to be realized or even pursued, because of the complications it might bring into his life. Yet she pleased him very much, and he concluded: "Decidedly I am in a very strange state of mind."

The clock struck, and this reminder of the hour made him start, affecting his nerves rather than his consciousness. He awaited her with that impatience which delay increases from second to second. She was always prompt, so that in less than ten minutes

he would see her enter. When the ten minutes had elapsed, he felt anxious, as at the approach of some sorrow, then irritated because she had made him lose time. Finally he realized that if she failed to come it would cause him actual suffering. What should he do? Should he wait for her? No; he would go out, so that if, by chance, she should arrive very late, she would find the studio empty.

He would go out, but when? What latitude should he allow her? Would it not be better to remain and to make her comprehend, by a few coldly polite words, that he was not one to be kept waiting? And suppose she did not come? Then he would receive a despatch, a card, a servant or a messenger. If she did not come, what should he do? It would be a day lost; he could not work. Then? Well, then he would go to seek some news of her, for see her he must!

It was quite true; he felt a profound, tormenting, harassing need of seeing her. What did it mean? Was it love? But he felt no mental exaltation, no intoxication of the senses; it awakened no perplexed anxiety when he realized that if she did not come that day he should suffer keenly.

The door-bell rang on the stairway of the little hôtel, and Olivier Bertin suddenly found himself short of breath, then so joyous that he executed a pirouette and flung his cigarette high in the air.

She entered alone. Immediately he became bold.

"Do you know what I asked myself while waiting for you?"

"No, indeed, I do not."

"I asked myself if I were not in love with you."

"In love with me? You must be mad!"

But she smiled and her smile said: That is very pretty; I am glad to hear it! However, she said: "You are not serious, of course. Why do you make such a jest?"

"On the contrary, I am absolutely serious," he replied. "I do not declare that I am in love with you, but I ask myself whether I am not well on the way to become so."

"What has made you think so?"

"My emotion when you are not here, my happiness when you arrive."

She seated herself.

"Oh, don't disturb yourself over anything so trifling! As long as you sleep well and have an appetite for dinner, there will be no danger!"

He began to laugh.

"And if I lose my sleep and no longer eat?"

"Let me know of it."

"And then?"

"I will allow you to recover yourself in peace."

"A thousand thanks!"

And on the theme of this uncertain love they spun theories and fancies all the afternoon. The same thing occurred on several successive days. Accepting his statement as a sort of jest, of no real importance, she would say gaily on entering: "Well, how goes your love to-day?"

He would reply lightly, yet with perfect seriousness, telling her of the progress of his malady, in all its intimate details, and of the depth of the tenderness that had been born and was daily increasing. He analyzed himself minutely before her, hour by hour, since their separation the evening before, with the air of a professor giving a lecture, and she lis-

tened with interest, a little moved and somewhat disturbed by this story which seemed like a novel of which she was the heroine. When he had enumerated, in his gallant and easy manner, all the anxieties of which he had become the prey, his voice would sometimes tremble in expressing by a word, or only by an intonation, the aching of his heart.

And she persisted in questioning him, vibrating with curiosity, her eyes fixed upon him, her ear eager for those things that are disturbing to hear but charming to listen to.

Sometimes when he approached her to alter a pose he would seize her hand and try to kiss it. With a swift movement she would draw away her fingers from his lips, saying, with a slight frown:

"Come, come—work!"

He would begin his work again, but within five minutes she would ask some adroit question that led him back to the sole topic that interested them.

By this time she began to feel some fear deep in her heart. She longed to be loved—but not too much! Sure of not being led away, she yet feared to allow him to venture too far, thereby losing him, since then she would be compelled to drive him to despair after seeming to encourage him. Yet, should it become necessary to renounce this tender and delicate friendship, this stream of pleasant converse which rippled along bearing nuggets of love like a river whose sand is full of gold, it would cause her great sorrow—a grief that would be heart-breaking.

When she set out from her own home to go to the painter's studio, a wave of joy, warm and penetrating, overflowed her spirit, making it light and happy.

As she laid her hand on Olivier's bell, her breast throbbed with impatience, and the stair carpet seemed the softest her feet ever had pressed. But Bertin became gloomy, a little nervous, often irritable. He had his moments of impatience, soon repressed, but frequently recurring.

One day, when she had just entered, he sat down beside her instead of beginning to paint, saying:

"Madame, you can no longer ignore the fact that what I have said is not a jest, and that I love you madly."

Troubled at this beginning, and seeing that the dreaded crisis had arrived, she tried to stop him, but he listened to her no longer. Emotion overflowed his heart, and she had to listen to him, pale, trembling and anxious. He spoke a long time, demanding nothing, tenderly, sadly, with despairing resignation, and she allowed him to take her hands, which he kept in his. He was kneeling before her without her noticing his attitude, and with a far-away look upon his face, he begged her not to work him any harm. What harm? She did not understand nor try to understand, overcome by the cruel grief of seeing him suffer, though that grief was almost happiness. Suddenly she saw tears in his eyes and was so deeply moved that she exclaimed: "Oh!"—ready to embrace him as one embraces a crying child. He said very gently: "There, there! I suffer too much." Then suddenly, affected by his sorrow, by the contagion of tears, she sobbed, her nerves quivering, her arms trembling, ready to be extended.

When she felt herself suddenly clasped in his embrace she wished to cry out, to struggle, to repulse him, but it was in vain, for she consented

while resisting; she yielded even while she struggled, pressing him to her as she cried: "No, no, I will not!"

Then, overcome with the emotion of that moment, she hid her face in her hands, and then suddenly springing to her feet, she caught up her hat, which had fallen to the floor, put it on her head and rushed away, in spite of the supplications of Olivier, who held her by the skirt.

As soon as she was in the street, she longed to sit down on the curbstone, her limbs were so exhausted and powerless. A cab was passing. She called it and said to the driver: "Drive slowly and take me wherever you like." She threw herself into the carriage, closed the door, sank back in one corner, feeling herself alone behind the raised windows—alone to think.

For some minutes she heard only the sound of the wheels and the jarring of the cab. She looked at the houses, the pedestrians, people in cabs and omnibuses with a blank gaze that saw nothing. She thought of nothing, as if she were giving herself time, granting herself a respite before daring to reflect upon what had happened.

Then, as she had a practical mind and was not lacking in courage, she said to herself: "I am lost!" For some time she remained under that feeling of certainty that irreparable misfortune had befallen her, horror-struck, like a man fallen from a roof, knowing that his legs are broken but dreading to verify his knowledge.

But, instead of feeling overwhelmed by the anticipation of suffering, her heart remained calm and peaceful after the catastrophe; it beat slowly, softly

after the fall that had terrified her soul, and seemed to take no part in the perturbation of her mind.

She repeated aloud, as if to understand and convince herself: "Yes, I am lost." No echo of suffering responded from her heart to this cry of her conscience.

She allowed herself to be soothed for some time by the movement of the carriage, putting off a little longer the necessity of facing this cruel situation. No, she did not suffer. She was afraid to think, that was all; she feared to know, to comprehend and to reflect. On the contrary, in that mysterious and impenetrable being created within us by the incessant struggle between our desires and our will, she felt an indescribable peace.

After perhaps half an hour of this strange repose, understanding at last that the despair she had invoked would not come, she shook off her torpor and murmured: "It is strange; I am hardly sorry even!"

Then she began to reproach herself. Anger awakened within her against her own blindness and her weakness. How had she not foreseen this, not comprehended that the hour for that struggle must come; that this man was so dear to her as to render her cowardly, and that sometimes in the purest hearts desire arises like a gust of wind, carrying the will before it?

But, after she had judged and reprimanded herself severely, she asked herself what would happen next.

Her first resolve was to break with the painter and never to see him again. Hardly had she formed this resolution before a thousand reasons sprang up as quickly to combat it. How could she explain such

a break? What should she say to her husband? Would not the suspected truth be whispered, then spread abroad?

Would it not be better, for the sake of appearances, to act, with Olivier Bertin himself, the hypocritical comedy of indifference and forgetfulness, to show him that she had effaced that moment from her memory and from her life?

But could she do it? Would she have the audacity to appear to recollect nothing, to assume a look of indignant astonishment in saying: "What would you with me?" to the man with whom she had actually shared that swift and ardent emotion?

She reflected a long time and decided that any other solution was impossible.

She would go to him courageously the next day and make him understand as soon as she could what she desired him to do. She must not use a word, an allusion, a look that could recall to him that moment of shame.

After he had suffered—for assuredly he would have his share of suffering, as a loyal and upright man—he would remain in future that which he had been up to the present.

As soon as this new resolution was formed, she gave her address to the coachman and returned home, profoundly depressed, with a desire to take to her bed, to see no one, to sleep and forget. Having shut herself in her room, she remained there until the dinner hour, lying on a couch, benumbed, not wishing to agitate herself longer with that thought so full of danger.

She descended at the exact hour, astonished to find herself so calm, and awaited her husband with

her ordinary demeanor. He appeared, carrying their little one in his arms; she pressed his hand and kissed the child and felt no pang of anguish.

Monsieur de Guilleroy inquired what she had been doing. She replied indifferently that she had been posing as usual.

"And the portrait—is it good?" he asked.

"It is coming on very well."

He spoke of his own affairs in his turn. He enjoyed talking, while dining, of the sitting of the Chamber and of the discussion of the proposed law on the adulteration of foodstuffs.

This rather tiresome talk, which she usually endured amiably, now irritated her and made her look with closer attention at the man who was vulgarly loquacious in his interest in such things, but she smiled as she listened and replied pleasantly, more gracious even than usual, more indulgent toward these commonplaces. As she looked at him she thought: "I have deceived him! He is my husband and I have deceived him! How strange it is! Nothing can change that fact, nothing can obliterate it! I closed my eyes. I submitted for a few seconds, a few seconds only, to a man's kisses, and I am no longer a virtuous woman. A few seconds in my life—seconds that never can be effaced—have brought into it that little irreparable fact, so grave, so short, a crime, the most shameful one for a woman—and yet I feel no despair! If any one had told me that yesterday, I should not have believed it. If any one had convinced me that it would indeed come to pass, I should have thought instantly of the terrible remorse that would fill my heart to-day."

Monsieur de Guilleroy went out after dinner, as

he did almost every evening. Then the countess took her little daughter on her lap, weeping over her and kissing her. The tears she shed were sincere, coming from her conscience, not from her heart.

But she slept very little. Amid the darkness of her room she tormented herself afresh as to the dangers of the attitude toward the painter that she purposed to assume. She dreaded the interview that must take place the following day and the things that he must say to her, looking her in the face meanwhile.

She rose early, but remained lying on her couch all the morning, forcing herself to foresee what it was she had to fear and what she must say in reply, in order to be ready for any surprise.

She went out early, so that she might have time to think while walking.

He hardly expected her and had been asking himself, since the evening before, what he should do when he met her.

After her hasty departure—that flight which he had not dared to oppose—he had remained alone, still listening, although she was already far away, for the sound of her step, the rustle of her skirt and the closing of the door, touched by a timid hand.

He remained standing, full of deep, ardent, intoxicating joy. He had won her, *her!* That had passed between them! Was it possible? After the surprise of this triumph, he gloated over it, and to realize it more keenly, he sat down, almost reclining on the divan where she had lately sat.

He remained there a long time, full of the thought that she was his mistress and that between them, between the woman he had so much desired and

himself, a few moments had tied that mysterious bond which secretly links two beings to each other. He retained in his still quivering body the piercingly sweet remembrance of that wild, fleeting moment when their lips had met, thrilled with the deepest emotion of life.

He did not go out that evening, in order to live over again that rapturous moment. He retired early, his heart vibrating with happiness. He had hardly awakened the next morning before he asked himself what he should do. To a flirt or an ordinary woman he would have sent flowers or even a jewel, but he was tortured with perplexity in this new situation.

He wished to express, in delicate and charming terms, the gratitude of his soul, his ecstasy of mad tenderness, his offer of a lifelong devotion, but he could find only set phrases, commonplace, vulgar and puerile expressions to set forth the tender, passionate things he longed to say.

Assuredly he must write—but what? He scribbled, erased, tore up and began anew twenty letters, all of which seemed to him insulting, odious, ridiculous.

He gave up the idea of writing, therefore, and decided to go to see her, as soon as the hour for the sitting had passed, for he felt very sure that she would not come.

Shutting himself up in his studio, he became enthusiastic over the portrait, his lips longing to press themselves on the painting, whereon something of herself was fixed; and again and again he looked out of the window into the street. Every gown he saw in the distance made his heart throb quickly. Twenty

times he believed that he saw her; then when the approaching woman had passed he sat down again, overcome as by a deception.

Suddenly he saw her, doubted, then took his opera glass, recognized her, and, dizzy with violent emotion, sat down once more to await her.

When she entered he threw himself on his knees and tried to take her hands, but she drew them away abruptly, and as he remained at her feet, filled with anguish, his eyes raised to hers, she said haughtily:

"What are you doing, monsieur? I do not understand that attitude."

"Oh, madame, I entreat you——"

She interrupted him harshly:

"Get up! You are ridiculous!"

He rose, dazed, and murmured:

"What is the matter? Do not treat me in this way—I love you!"

Then, in a few short, dry phrases, she intimated her wishes and laid down the law.

"I do not understand what you mean. Never speak to me of your love or I shall leave this studio never to return. If you forget for a single moment this condition of my presence here, you never will see me again."

He looked at her, crushed by this unexpected harshness. Then he understood and murmured:

"I will obey, madame."

"Very well," she rejoined; "I expected that of you! Now work, for you are slow in finishing that portrait."

He took up his palette and began to paint, but his hand trembled, his troubled eyes looked without

seeing; he felt a desire to weep, so deeply wounded was his heart.

He tried to talk to her; she barely answered him. When he attempted to pay her some little compliment on her complexion, she cut him short in a tone so brusque that he felt suddenly one of those furies of a lover that change tenderness to hatred. Through soul and body he felt a nervous shock, and in a moment he detested her. Yes, yes, that was just like a woman! She was like all the rest! Why not? She, too, was false, changeable and weak, like all of them. She had attracted him, seduced him with girlish ruses, trying to overcome him without intending to give him anything in return, enticing him only to refuse him, employing toward him all the tricks of cowardly coquettes who seem always on the point of yielding so long as the man who cringes like a dog before them dares not carry out his desire.

But the situation was worse for her, after all. He had held her in his arms, kissed her. She might try to wash away that fact and answer him insolently. She could efface nothing, and he—he would forget it! Indeed, it would have been a fine bit of folly to entangle himself with any one who would eat into his artist life with the capricious teeth of a pretty woman.

He felt a desire to whistle, as he did in the presence of his models, but realized that his nerve was giving way and feared to commit some stupidity. He cut short the sitting under pretense of having an appointment. When they bowed at parting they felt themselves farther apart than the day they first met at the Duchesse de Mortemain's.

As soon as she had gone, he took his hat and top-

coat and went out. A cold sun in a misty blue sky threw over the city a pale, depressing, unreal light.

After he had walked a long time, with rapid and irritated step, elbowing the passers-by so as not to deviate from a straight line, his great fury against her began to change into sadness and regret. After he had repeated to himself all the reproaches he had poured upon her, he remembered, as he looked at the women that passed him, how pretty and charming she was. Like many others who do not admit it, he had always been waiting to meet the "impossible she," to find the rare, unique, poetic and passionate being, the dream of whom hovers over our hearts. Had he not almost found it? Was it not she who might have given him this almost impossible happiness? Why is it that nothing comes true? Why can one never seize what one is pursuing or can succeed only in grasping a phantom, which renders still more grievous this pursuit of illusions?

He was no longer resentful toward her; it was toward life that he was bitter. Now that he was able to reason, he asked himself what cause for anger he had against her. What could he reproach her with, after all?—with being amiable, kind and gracious toward him; while she, for her part, might well reproach him for having behaved like a villain!

He returned home full of sadness. He would have liked to ask her pardon, to devote himself to her, to make her forget; and he pondered as to how he might enable her to comprehend that henceforth, until death, he would be obedient to all her wishes.

The next day she arrived, accompanied by her daughter, with a smile so sad, an expression so pathetic, that the painter fancied he could see in

those poor blue eyes, that had always been so merry, all the pain, all the remorse, all the desolation of that womanly heart. He was moved to pity, and, in order that she might forget, he showed her, with delicate reserve, the most thoughtful attentions. She acknowledged them with gentleness and kindness, with the weary and languid manner of a woman who suffers.

And looking at her, seized again with a mad dream of loving and of being loved, he asked himself why she was not more indignant at his conduct, how she could still come to his studio, listen to him and answer him, with that memory between them.

Since she could bear to see him again, however, could endure to hear his voice, having always in her mind the one thought which she could not escape, it must be that this thought had not become intolerable to her. When a woman hates the man who has conquered her thus, she cannot remain in his presence without showing her hatred, but that man never can remain wholly indifferent to her. She must either detest him or pardon him. And when she pardons that transgression, she is not far from love!

While he painted slowly, he arrived at this conclusion by small arguments, precise, clear and sure; he now felt himself strong, steady, and master of the situation. He had only to be prudent, patient, devoted, and one day or another she would relent.

He knew how to wait. In order to reassure her and to conquer her once more, he practiced ruses in his turn; he assumed a tenderness restrained by apparent remorse, hesitating attentions, and indifferent attiudes. Tranquil in the certainty of approaching happiness, what did it matter whether it arrived

a little sooner, a little later? He even experienced a strange, subtle pleasure in delay, in watching her, and saying to himself, "She is afraid!" as he saw her coming always with her child.

He felt that between them a slow work of reconciliation was going on, and thought that in the countess' eyes was something strange: constraint, a sweet sadness, that appeal of a struggling soul, of a faltering will, which seems to say: "But—conquer me, then!"

After awhile she came alone once more, reassured by his reserve. Then he treated her as a friend, a comrade; he talked to her of his life, his plans, his art, as to a brother.

Deluded by this attitude, she assumed joyfully the part of counselor, flattered that he distinguished her thus above other women, and convinced that his talent would gain in delicacy through this intellectual intimacy. But, from consulting her and showing deference to her, he caused her to pass naturally from the functions of a counselor to the sacred office of inspirer. She found it charming to use her influence thus over the great man, and almost consented that he should love her as an artist, since it was she that gave him inspiration for his work!

It was one evening, after a long talk about the loves of illustrious painters, that she let herself glide into his arms.

She felt no remorse now, only the vague consciousness of a fall; and to stifle the reproaches of her reason she attributed it to fatality.

Drawn toward him by her virgin heart and her empty soul, the flesh overcome by the slow domina-

tion of caresses, little by little she attached herself to him, as do all tender women who love for the first time.

With Olivier it was a crisis of acute love, sensuous and poetic. It seemed to him sometimes that one day he had taken flight, with hands extended, and that he had been able to clasp in full embrace that winged and magnificent dream which is always hovering over our hopes.

He had finished the countess' portrait, the best, certainly, that he ever had painted, for he had discovered and crystallized that inexpressible something which a painter seldom succeeds in unveiling —that reflection, that mystery, that physiognomy of the soul, which passes intangibly across a face.

Months rolled by, then years, which hardly loosened the tie that united the Comtesse de Guilleroy and the painter, Olivier Bertin. With him it was no longer the exaltation of the beginning, but a calm, deep affection, a sort of loving friendship that had become a habit.

With her, on the contrary, the passionate, persistent attachment of certain women who give themselves to a man wholly and forever was always growing. They have bound their lives resolutely, as one who knows how to swim, yet wishing to die, ties his hands together before leaping from a high bridge into the water.

But from the moment when the countess had yielded, she was assailed by fears for Bertin's constancy. Nothing held him but his masculine will, his caprice, his passing fancy for a woman he had met one day just as he had already met so many others! She realized that he was so free, so sus-

ceptible to temptation—he who lived without duties, habits, or scruples, like all men! He was handsome, celebrated, much sought after, having within the scope of his easily awakened desires, fashionable women, whose modesty is so fragile, women of the demi-monde, or the theatre, prodigal of their favors with such men as he. One of them, some evening after supper, might follow him and, being agreeable to him, might take him and keep him.

Thus she lived in terror of losing him, watching his manner, his attitudes, startled by a word, full of anguish when he admired another woman, praised the charm of her countenance or her grace of bearing. All that she was ignorant of in his life made her tremble. At each of their meetings she questioned him ingeniously, without his perceiving it, in order to make him express his opinion of the people he had seen, the houses where he had dined, in short, the lightest expression of his mind. As soon as she fancied she detected the influence of some other person, she tried to counteract it with great astuteness and innumerable resources.

Oh, how often did she suspect those brief intrigues, without depth, lasting perhaps a week or two, from time to time, which come into the life of every prominent artist!

She had, as it were, an intuition of danger, even before she detected the awakening of a new desire in Olivier, by the look of triumph in his eyes, the expression of a man when swayed by a gallant fancy.

Then she would suffer; her sleep would be tortured by doubts. In order to surprise him, she would appear suddenly in his studio, without giving

him notice of her coming, ask apparently innocent questions, test his tenderness while listening to his words as we palpate a body to detect symptoms of disease. Then she would weep as soon as she found herself alone, sure that some one would take him from her this time, robbing her of that love to which she clung so passionately because she had staked upon it all her will, all her strength of affection, all her hopes and dreams.

And when she saw that he came back to her, after these brief diversions, she experienced, as she drew close to him again, took possession of him as of something lost and recovered again, a deep, silent happiness which sometimes, when she passed a church, urged her to go in and thank God.

Her constant effort to make herself more attractive than anyone else and to hold him in spite of others, had made her whole life an uninterrupted series of coquetry. She had ceaselessly struggled for him, and before him, with her grace, her beauty and elegance. She wished that wherever he went he should hear her praised for her charm, her taste, her wit, and her toilets. She wished to please others for his sake, and to attract them so that he should be both proud and jealous of her. And every time that she succeeded in arousing his jealousy, after making him suffer a little, she allowed him the triumph of winning her back, which revived his love by exciting his vanity. Then, realizing that it was always possible for a man to meet in society a woman whose physical charm would be greater than her own, being a novelty, she resorted to other means: she flattered and spoiled him. Discreetly, but continuously, she heaped praises upon him in

flattery, so that he might find all other friendship, all other love, even, a little cold and incomplete, and that if others also loved him he would perceive at last that she alone understood him.

She made the two drawing-rooms in her house, which he entered so often, a place as attractive to the pride of the artist as to the heart of the man, the place in all Paris where he liked best to come, because there all his cravings were satisfied at the same time.

Not only did she learn to discover all his tastes, in order that, while gratifying them in her own house, she might give him a feeling of well-being that nothing could replace, but she knew how to create new tastes, to arouse appetites of all kinds, material and intellectual, habits of little attentions, of affection, of adoration and flattery! She tried to charm his eye with elegance, his sense of smell with perfumes, and his taste with delicate food.

But when she had planted in the soul and in the senses of a selfish bachelor a multitude of petty, tyrannical needs, when she had become quite certain that no one else would trouble herself as she did to watch over and maintain them, in order to surround him with all the little pleasures of life, she suddenly feared, as she saw him disgusted with his own home, always complaining of his solitary life, and, being unable to come into her home except under all the restraints imposed by society, going to the club, seeking every means to soften his lonely lot—she feared lest he should think of marriage.

On some days she suffered so much from all these anxieties that she longed for old age, to put an end

to this anguish, that she might be at ease in a cooler and calmer affection.

Years passed, however, without disuniting them. The chain wherewith she had attached him to her was heavy, and she made new links as the old ones wore away. But, always solicitous, she watched over the painter's heart as one guards a child crossing a street full of vehicles, and day by day she lived in expectation of the unknown danger, the dread of which always hung over her.

The count, without suspicion or jealousy, found this intimacy of his wife with a famous and popular artist a perfectly natural thing. Through continually meeting, the two men, becoming accustomed to each other, finally became excellent friends.

CHAPTER II

TWIN ROSES FROM A SINGLE STEM

On Friday evening when Bertin entered the house of his friend, where he was to dine in honor of the return of Antoinette de Guilleroy, he found in the little Louis XV salon only Monsieur de Musadieu, who had just arrived.

He was a clever old man, who might have made a name for himself, and who now could not console himself for not having done so.

He had once been a commissioner of the imperial museum, and had found means to get himself reappointed Inspector of Fine Arts under the Republic, which did not prevent him from being, above all

else, the friend of princes, of all the princes, princesses and duchesses of European aristocracy, and the sworn protector of artists of all sorts. He was endowed with an alert mind and excellent judgment, with great facility of speech that enabled him to say agreeably the most ordinary things, with a suppleness of thought that put him at ease in any society, and a subtile diplomatic perception that gave him the power to estimate men at first sight; and he strolled from salon to salon, morning and evening, with his enlightened, useless and gossiping activity.

Apt at everything, as he appeared, he would talk on any subject with an air of convincing competence and familiarity that made him greatly appreciated by fashionable women, whom he served as a sort of travelling encyclopedia of erudition. As a matter of fact, he knew many things without ever having read any but the most indispensable books; but he stood very well with the five Academies, with all the *savants,* writers, and learned specialists, to whom he listened with clever discernment. He knew how to forget at once explanations that were too technical or were useless to him, remembered the others very well, and gave forth the information thus gleaned in an easy, clear, and good-natured manner, that made it as readily comprehensible as the popular presentation of scientific facts. He gave the impression of being a veritable storehouse of ideas, one of those vast places wherein one never finds rare objects but discovers a multiplicity of cheap productions of all kinds, and from all sources, from household utensils to the popular instruments for physical culture or for domestic surgery.

The painters, with whom his official functions brought him in continual contact, made sport of him, but feared him. He rendered them some services, however, helped them to sell pictures, brought them in contact with fashionable persons, and enjoyed introducing them, protecting them, launching them. He seemed to devote himself to a mysterious function of blending the fashionable and the artistic worlds, pluming himself on his intimate acquaintance with the former, and of his familiar footing with the latter, on breakfasting with the Prince of Wales on his way through Paris, or dining, the same evening, with Paul Adelmant, Olivier Bertin and Amaury Maldant.

Bertin, who liked him well enough, found him amusing, and said of him: "He is the encyclopedia of Jules Verne, bound in asses' skin!"

The two men shook hands and began to talk of the political situation and the rumors of war, which Musadieu thought alarming, for evident reasons which he explained very well, Germany having every interest in crushing us and in hastening that moment for which M. de Bismarck had been waiting eighteen years; while Olivier Bertin proved by irrefutable argument that these fears were chimerical, it being impossible for Germany to be foolish enough to risk her conquest in an always doubtful venture, or for the Chancellor to be imprudent enough to risk, in the latter years of his life, his achievements and his glory at a single blow.

M. de Musadieu, however, seemed to know something of which he did not wish to speak. Furthermore, he had seen a minister that morning and had

met the Grand Duke Vladimir, returning from Cannes, the evening before.

The artist was unconvinced by this, and with quiet irony expressed doubt of the knowledge of even the best informed. Behind all these rumors was the influence of the Bourse! Bismarck alone might have a settled opinion on the subject.

M. de Guilleroy entered, shook hands warmly, excusing himself in unctuous words for having left them alone.

"And you, my dear deputy," asked the painter, "what do you think of these rumors of war?"

M. de Guilleroy launched into a discourse. As a member of the Chamber, he knew more of the subject than anyone else, though he held an opinion differing from that of most of his colleagues. No, he did not believe in the probability of an approaching conflict, unless it should be provoked by French turbulence and by the rodomontades of the self-styled patriots of the League. And he painted Bismarck's portrait in striking colors, a portrait *à la* Saint-Simon. The man Bismarck was one that no one wished to understand, because one always lends to others his own ways of thinking, and credits them with a readiness to do that which he would do were he placed in their situation. M. de Bismarck was not a false and lying diplomatist, but brutally frank, always loudly proclaiming the truth and announcing his intentions. "I want peace!" said he. That was true; he wanted peace, nothing but peace, and everything had proved it in a dazzling fashion for eighteen years; everything—his armaments, his alliances, that union of peoples banded together against our impetuosity. M. de Guilleroy con-

cluded in a tone of profound conviction: "He is a great man, a very great man who desires peace, but who has faith only in menaces and violent means as the way to obtain it. In short, gentlemen, a great barbarian."

"He that wishes the end to justify the means," M. de Musadieu replied. "I will grant you willingly that he adores peace if you will concede to me that he always wishes to make war in order to obtain it. But that is an indisputable and phenomenal truth: in this world war is made only to obtain peace!"

A servant announced: "Madame la Duchesse de Mortemain."

Between the folding-doors appeared a tall, large woman, who entered with an air of authority.

Guilleroy hastened to meet her, and kissed her hand, saying:

"How do you do, duchess?"

The other two men saluted her with a certain distinguished familiarity, for the duchess' manner was both cordial and abrupt.

She was the widow of a general, the Duc de Mortemain, mother of an only daughter married to the Prince de Salia; daughter of the Marquis de Farandal, of high family and royally rich, and received at her mansion in the Rue de Varenne all the celebrities of the world, who met and complimented one another there. No highness passed through Paris without dining at her table; no man could attract public attention that she did not immediately wish to know him. She must see him, make him talk to her, form her own judgment of him. This amused her greatly, lent interest to life, and fed the

flame of imperious yet kindly curiosity that burned within her.

She had hardly seated herself when the same servant announced:

"Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne de Corbelle."

They were young: the baron was bald and fat, the baroness was slender, elegant, and very dark.

This couple occupied a peculiar situation in the French aristocracy due solely to a scrupulous choice of connections. Belonging to the inferior nobility, but without worth or talent, the motive of all their actions being an immoderate love of that which is select, correct and distinguished, they had by dint of visiting only the most princely houses, of professing their royalist sentiments, pious and correct to a supreme degree; of respecting all that should be respected, of condemning all that should be condemned, never being mistaken on a point of worldly dogma or hesitating over a detail of etiquette, succeeded in passing in the eyes of many for the finest flower of high life. Their opinion formed a sort of code of correct form, and their presence in a house gave it a true title of distinction.

The Corbelles were relatives of the Comte de Guilleroy.

"Well," said the duchess in astonishment, "and your wife?"

"One instant, one little instant," pleaded the count. "There is a surprise: she is just about to come."

When Madame de Guilleroy, as the bride of a month, had entered society, she was presented to the Duchesse de Mortemain, who loved her immediately, adopted her, and patronized her.

For twenty years this friendship never had diminished, and when the duchess said *"Ma petite,"* one still heard in her voice the tenderness of that sudden and persistent affection. It was at her house that the painter and the countess had happened to meet.

Musadieu approached the group. "Has the duchess been to see the exposition of the Intemperates?" he inquired.

"No; what is that?"

"A group of new artists, impressionists in a state of intoxication. Two of them are very fine."

The great lady murmured, with disdain: "I do not like the jests of those gentlemen."

Authoritative, brusque, barely tolerating any other opinion than her own, and founding hers solely on the consciousness of her social station, considering, without being able to give a good reason for it, that artists and learned men were merely intelligent mercenaries charged by God to amuse society or to render service to it, she had no other basis for her criticisms than the degree of astonishment or of pleasure she experienced at the sight of a thing, the reading of a book, or the account of a discovery.

Tall, stout, heavy, red, with a loud voice, she passed as having the air of a great lady because nothing embarrassed her; she dared to say anything and patronized the whole world, dethroned princes, with her receptions in their honor, and even the Almighty by her generosity to the clergy and her gifts to the churches.

"Does the duchess know," Musadieu continued, "that they say the assassin of Marie Lambourg has been arrested?"

Her interest was awakened at once.

"No, tell me about it," she replied.

He narrated the details. Musadieu was tall and very thin; he wore a white waistcoat and little diamond shirt-studs; he spoke without gestures, with a correct air which allowed him to say the daring things which he took delight in uttering. He was very near-sighted, and appeared, notwithstanding his eyeglass, never to see anyone; and when he sat down his whole frame seemed to accommodate itself to the shape of the chair. His figure seemed to shrink into folds, as if his spinal column were made of rubber; his legs, crossed one over the other, looked like two rolled ribbons, and his long arms, resting on the arms of the chair, allowed his pale hands with interminable fingers to droop. His hair and mustache, artistically dyed, with a few white locks cleverly forgotten, were a subject of frequent jests.

While he was explaining to the duchess that the jewels of the murdered woman had been given as a present by the suspected murderer to another girl of the same stamp, the door of the large drawing-room opened wide once more, and two blonde women in white lace, a creamy Mechlin, resembling each other as might two sisters of different ages, the one a little mature, the other a little too young, one a trifle too plump, the other a shade too slender, advanced, clasping each other round the waist and smiling.

The guests exclaimed and applauded. No one, except Olivier Bertin, knew of Annette de Guilleroy's return, and the appearance of the young girl beside her mother, who at a little distance seemed

almost as fresh and even more beautiful—for, like a flower in full bloom, she had not ceased to be brilliant, while the child, hardly budding, was only beginning to be pretty—made both appear charming.

The duchess, delighted, clapped her hands, exclaiming: "Heavens! How charming and amusing they are, standing beside each other! Look, Monsieur de Musadieu, how much they resemble each other!"

The two were compared, and two opinions were formed. According to Musadieu, the Corbelles, and the Comte de Guilleroy, the countess and her daughter resembled each other only in coloring, in their hair, and above all in their eyes, which were exactly alike, both showing tiny black dots, like minute drops of ink, on the blue iris. But it was their opinion that when the young girl became a woman, they would no longer resemble each other.

According to the duchess, on the contrary, and also Olivier Bertin, they were similar in all respects, and only the difference in age made them appear unlike.

"How she has changed in three years!" said the painter. "I should not have recognized her, and I shall no longer dare to *tutoyer* the young lady!"

The countess laughed. "The idea! I should like to hear you say 'you' to Annette!"

The young girl, whose future gay audacity was already apparent under an air of timid playfulness, replied: "It is I who shall not dare to say 'thou' to Monsieur Bertin."

Her mother smiled.

"Yes, continue the old habit—I will allow you

to do so," she said. "You will soon renew your acquaintance with him."

But Annette shook her head.

"No, no, it would embarrass me," she said.

The duchess embraced her, and examined her with all the interest of a connoisseur.

"Look me in the face, my child," she said. "Yes, you have exactly the same expression as your mother; you won't be so bad by and by, when you have acquired more polish. And you must grow a bit plumper—not very much, but a little. You are very thin."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed the countess.

"Why not?"

"It is so nice to be slender. I intend to reduce myself at once."

But Madame de Mortemain took offense, forgetting in her anger the presence of a young girl.

"Oh, of course, you are all in favor of bones, because you can dress them better than flesh. For my part, I belong to the generation of fat women! To-day is the day of thin ones. They make me think of the lean kine of Egypt. I cannot understand how men can admire your skeletons. In my time they demanded more!"

She subsided amid the smiles of the company, but added, turning to Annette:

"Look at your mamma, little one; she does very well; she has attained the happy medium—imitate her."

They passed into the dining-room. After they were seated, Musadieu resumed the discussion.

"For my part, I say that men should be thin, because they are formed for exercises that require ad-

dress and agility, incompatible with corpulency. But the women's case is a little different. Don't you think so, Corbelle?"

Corbelle was perplexed, the duchess being stout and his own wife more than slender. But the baroness came to the rescue of her husband, and resolutely declared herself in favor of slimness. The year before that, she declared, she had been obliged to struggle with the beginning of *embonpoint,* over which she soon triumphed.

"Tell us how you did it," demanded Madame de Guilleroy.

The baroness explained the method employed by all the fashionable women of the day. One must never drink while eating; but an hour after the repast a cup of tea might be taken, boiling hot. This method succeeded with everyone. She cited astonishing cases of fat women who in three months had become more slender than the blade of a knife. The duchess exclaimed in exasperation:

"Good gracious, how stupid to torture oneself like that! You like nothing any more—nothing—not even champagne. Bertin, as an artist, what do you think of this folly?"

"*Mon Dieu,* madame, I am a painter and I simply arrange the drapery, so it is all the same to me. If I were a sculptor I might complain."

"But as a man, which do you prefer?"

"I? Oh—a certain rounded slimness—what my cook calls a nice little corn-fed chicken. It is not fat, but plump and delicate."

The comparison caused a laugh; but the incredulous countess looked at her daughter and murmured:

"No, it is very much better to be thin; slender women never grow old."

This point also was discussed by the company; and all agreed that a very fat person should not grow thin too rapidly.

This observation gave place to a review of women known in society and to new discussions on their grace, their *chic* and beauty. Musadieu pronounced the blonde Marquise de Lochrist incomparably charming, while Bertin esteemed as a beauty Madame Mandelière, with her brunette complexion, low brow, her dusky eyes and somewhat large mouth, in which her teeth seemed to sparkle.

He was seated beside the young girl, and said suddenly, turning to her:

"Listen to me, Nanette. Everything that we have just been saying you will hear repeated at least once a week until you are old. In a week you will know all that society thinks about politics, women, plays, and all the rest of it. Only an occasional change of names will be necessary—names of persons and titles of works. When you have heard us all express and defend our opinions, you will quietly choose your own among those that one must have, and then you need never trouble yourself to think of anything more, never. You will only have to rest."

The young girl, without replying, turned upon him her mischievous eyes, wherein sparkled youthful intelligence, restrained, but ready to escape.

But the duchess and Musadieu, who played with ideas as one tosses a ball, without perceiving that they continually exchanged the same ones, protested in the name of thought and of human activity.

Then Bertin attempted to show how the intelli-

gence of fashionable people, even the brightest of them, is without value, foundation, or weight; how slight is the basis of their beliefs, how feeble and indifferent is their interest in intellectual things, how fickle and questionable are their tastes.

Carried away by one of those spasms of indignation, half real, half assumed, aroused at first by a desire to be eloquent, and urged on by the sudden prompting of a clear judgment, ordinarily obscured by an easy-going nature, he showed how those persons whose sole occupation in life is to pay visits and dine in town find themselves becoming, by an irresistible fatality, light and graceful but utterly trivial beings, vaguely agitated by superficial cares, beliefs and appetites.

He showed that there is no depth, ardor, or sincerity among them; that, possessing no intellectual culture and a mere veneer of information, they remain, in fact, manikins who produce the effect and make the gestures of the enlightened beings that they are not. He proved that, the frail roots of their instincts having been nourished on conventionalities instead of realities, they love nothing sincerely, that even the luxury of their existence is a satisfaction of vanity and not the gratification of a refined bodily necessity, for usually their table is indifferent, their wines, which are expensive, are bad.

They live, he said, on the outside of everything without seeing or understanding anything; outside of science, of which they are ignorant; outside of nature, at which they do not know how to look; outside of true happiness, for they are powerless to enjoy it; outside of the beauty of the world and the

beauty of art, of which they chatter without having really discovered it, or even believing in it, for they are ignorant of the intoxication of tasting the joys of life and of the intellect. They are incapable of attaching themselves to any one thing up to the point of loving that alone, of interesting themselves in anything to that degree that existence is illumined by the happiness of comprehending it.

The Baron de Corbelle thought that it was his duty to come to the defence of society. This he did with inconsistent and irrefutable arguments, which melt before reason as snow before the fire, yet which cannot be disproved—the absurd and triumphant arguments of a country curate who would demonstrate the existence of God. In concluding, he compared fashionable people to racehorses, which, in truth, are good for nothing, but which are the glory of the equine race.

Bertin, irritated by this adversary, preserved a politely disdainful silence. But all at once the baron's imbecilities exasperated him, and, interrupting him adroitly, he recounted the life of a man of fashion from his rising to his going to rest, without omitting anything. All the details, cleverly described, made up an irresistibly amusing silhouette. One could see the fine gentleman dressed by his valet, first expressing a few general ideas to the hairdresser that came to shave him; then, when taking his morning stroll, inquiring of the grooms about the health of the horses; then trotting through the avenues of the Bois, caring only about bowing to acquaintances and being greeted in turn; then breakfasting opposite his wife, who for her part, had been out in her coupé, speaking to her only to enumerate

the names of the persons he had met that morning; then passing from drawing-room to drawing-room until evening, refreshing his intelligence by contact with others of his circle, dining at the house of a prince, where the affairs of Europe were discussed, and finishing the evening behind the scenes at the Opéra, where his timid pretensions at being a man of the world were innocently satisfied by the appearance of being surrounded by naughtiness.

The picture was so true, without its satire wounding no one present, that laughter ran round the table.

The duchess, shaking with the suppressed merriment of fat persons, relieved herself by discreet chuckles.

"Really, you are too funny!" she said at last; "you will make me die of laughter."

Bertin replied, with some excitement:

"Oh, madame, in the polite world one does not die of laughter! One hardly laughs, even. We have the amiability, as a matter of good taste, to pretend to be amused and to pretend to laugh. The grimace is imitated well enough, but the real thing is never done. Go to the theatres of the common people—there you will see laughter. Go among the *bourgeoisie,* when they are amusing themselves; you will see them laugh to suffocation. Go to the soldiers' quarters, you will see men choking, their eyes full of tears, doubled up on their beds over the jokes of some funny fellow. But in our drawing-rooms we never laugh. I tell you that we simulate everything, even laughter."

Musadieu interrupted him:

"Permit me to say that you are very severe. It seems to me that you yourself, my dear fellow, do

not wholly despise this society at which you rail so bitterly."

Bertin smiled.

"I? I love it!" he declared.

"Well, then——?"

"I despise myself a little, as a mongrel of doubtful race."

"All that sort of talk is nothing but a pose," said the duchess.

And, as he denied having any intention of posing, she cut short the discussion by declaring that all artists try to make people believe that chalk is cheese.

The conversation then became general, touching upon everything, in a light and flippant, friendly and discreet manner, and, as the dinner was drawing to a close, the countess suddenly exclaimed, pointing to the full glasses of wine ranged before her:

"Well, you see that I have drunk nothing, nothing, not a drop! We shall see whether I grow thin!"

The duchess, furious, tried to make her swallow some mineral water, but in vain; then she exclaimed:

"Oh, the little simpleton! That daughter of hers will turn her head. I beg of you, Guilleroy, prevent your wife from committing this folly."

The count, who was explaining to Musadieu the system of a threshing-machine invented in America, had not been listening.

"What folly, duchess?"

"The folly of wishing to grow thin."

The count looked at his wife with an expression of kindly indifference.

"I never have formed the habit of opposing her," he replied.

The countess had risen, taking the arm of her neighbor; the count offered his to the duchess, and they passed into the large drawing-room, the boudoir at the end being reserved for use in the daytime.

It was an immense, well lighted room. On the four walls the large and beautiful panels of pale blue silk, of antique pattern, framed in white and gold, took on under the light of the lamps and the chandelier a moonlight softness and brightness. In the centre of the principal one, the portrait of the countess by Olivier Bertin seemed to inhabit, to animate the apartment. It had a look of being at home there, mingling with the air of the salon its youthful smile, the grace of its pose, the bright charm of its golden hair. It had become almost a custom, a sort of polite ceremony, like making the sign of the cross on entering a church, to compliment the model on the work of the painter whenever anyone stood before it.

Musadieu never failed to do this. His opinion as a connoisseur commissioned by the state having the value of that of an official expert, he regarded it as his duty to affirm often, with conviction, the superiority of that painting.

"Truly," said he, "that is the most beautiful modern portrait I know. There is prodigious life in it."

The Count de Guilleroy, who, through hearing this portrait continually praised, had acquired a rooted conviction that he possessed a masterpiece, approached to add his praise, and for a minute or two they lavished upon the portrait all the art technicali-

ties of the day in praise of the apparent qualities of the work, and also of those that were suggested.

All eyes were turned toward the portrait, apparently in a rapture of admiration, and Olivier Bertin, accustomed to these eulogies, to which he paid hardly more attention than to questions about his health when meeting some one in the street, nevertheless adjusted the reflector lamp placed before the portrait in order to illumine it, the servant having carelessly set it a little on one side.

Then they seated themselves, and as the count approached the duchess, she said to him:

"I believe that my nephew is coming here for me, and also to ask you for a cup of tea."

For some time there had been a mutual understanding between them, so that their wishes coincided without being expressed; even by a hint.

The Marquis de Farandal, who was the brother of the Duchesse de Mortemain, after almost ruining himself at the gaming table, had died of the effects of a fall from his horse, leaving a widow and a son. This young man, now nearly twenty-eight years of age, was one of the most popular leaders of the cotillon in Europe, for he was sometimes requested to go to Vienna or to London to dance the waltz at some princely ball. Although possessing very small means, he remained, through his social station, his family, his name, and his almost royal connections, one of the most popular and envied men in Paris.

It was necessary to give a solid foundation to this convivial, dancing glory of his youth, and after a rich, a very rich marriage, to replace social triumphs by political success. As soon as the marquis became a deputy, he would become also, by that fact alone,

one of the props of the future throne, one of the counselors of the king, one of the leaders of the party.

The duchess, who was well informed, knew the amount of the enormous fortune of the Comte de Guilleroy, a prudent hoarder of money, who lived in a simple apartment when he was quite able to live like a great lord in one of the handsomest mansions of Paris. She knew about his invariably successful speculations, his subtle judgment as a financier, his share in the most fruitful schemes of the past ten years, and she had cherished the idea of marrying her nephew to the daughter of the Norman deputy, to whom this marriage would give overwhelming influence in the aristocratic society of the princely circle. Guilleroy, who had made a rich marriage, and had thereby increased a large personal fortune, now nursed other ambitions.

He had faith in the return of the king, and wished, when that event should come, to be so situated as to derive from it the largest personal profit.

As a simple deputy, he did not cut a prominent figure. As the father-in-law of the Marquis of Farandal, whose ancestors had been the faithful and chosen familiars of the royal house of France, he might rise to the first rank.

The friendship of the duchess for his wife lent to this union an element of intimacy that was very precious; and, for fear some other young girl might appear who would please the marquis, he had brought about the return of his own daughter in order to hasten events.

Madame de Mortemain, foreseeing and divining his plans, lent him her silent complicity; and on that

very day, although she had not been informed of the sudden return of the young girl, she had made an appointment with her nephew to meet her at the Guilleroys, so that he might gradually become accustomed to visit that house frequently.

For the first time, the count and the duchess spoke of their mutual desires in veiled terms; and when they parted, a treaty of alliance had been concluded.

At the other end of the room everyone was laughing at a story M. de Musadieu was telling to the Baroness de Corbelle about the presentation of a negro ambassador to the President of the Republic, when the Marquis de Farandal was announced.

He appeared in the doorway and paused. With a quick and familiar gesture, he placed a monocle on his right eye and left it there, as if to reconnoiter the room he was about to enter, but perhaps to give those that were already there time to see him and to observe his entrance. Then by an imperceptible movement of cheek and eyebrow, he let the monocle fall from his eye and hang at the end of a silk cord, and advanced quickly toward Madame de Guilleroy, whose extended hand he kissed, bowing very low. He greeted his aunt likewise, then shook hands with the rest of the company, going from one to another with easy elegance of manner.

He was a tall fellow, with a red mustache, and was already slightly bald, with the figure of an officer and the gait of an English sportsman. It was evident, at first sight, that all his limbs were better exercised than his head, and that he cared only for such occupations as developed strength and physical activity. He had some education, however, for he had learned, and was learning every day, by much

mental effort, a great deal that would be useful to him to know later: history, studying dates unweariedly, but mistaking the lesson to be learned from facts and the elementary notions of political economy necessary to a deputy, the A B C of sociology for the use of the ruling classes.

Musadieu esteemed him, saying: "He will be a valuable man." Bertin appreciated his skill and his vigor. They went to the same fencing-hall, often hunted together, and met while riding in the avenues of the Bois. Between them, therefore, had been formed a sympathy of similar tastes, that instinctive free-masonry which creates between two men a ready subject of conversation, as agreeable to one as to the other.

When the marquis was presented to Annette de Guilleroy, he immediately had a suspicion of his aunt's designs, and after greeting her he ran his eyes over her, with the rapid glance of a connoisseur.

He decided that she was graceful, and, above all, full of promise, for he had led so many cotillons that he knew young girls well and could predict almost to a certainty the future of their beauty as an expert who tastes a wine as yet too new.

He exchanged only a few unimportant words with her, then seated himself near the Baroness de Corbelle, so that he could chat with her in an undertone.

Every one took leave at an early hour, and when all had gone, when the child was in her bed, the lamps extinguished, the servants gone to their own quarters, the Comte de Guilleroy, walking up and down the drawing-room, lighted now by only two candles, detained the countess, who was half asleep in an armchair, for some time to tell her of his hopes,

to lay down the plan they should follow, to forecast all the combinations, the events and the precautions to be taken.

It was late when he retired, charmed, however, with his evening and murmuring: "I believe that that affair is a certainty."

CHAPTER III

A FLAME REKINDLED

"When will you come, my friend? I have not seen you for three days, and that seems a long time to me. My daughter occupies much of my time, but you know that I can no longer do without you."

The painter, who was drawing sketches, ever seeking a new subject, reread the countess' note. Then, opening the drawer of a writing-desk, he deposited it on a heap of other letters, which had been accumulating there.

Thanks to the opportunities given them by the customs of fashionable society, they had grown used to seeing each other almost every day. Now and then she visited him and sat for an hour or two in the armchair in which she had posed while he worked. But, as she feared the criticisms of the servants, she preferred to receive him at her own home or to meet him at some reception for that daily interview, that small change of love.

These meetings would be agreed upon beforehand

and always seemed perfectly natural to M. de Guilleroy.

Twice a week at least the painter dined at the countess' house with a few friends; on Monday nights he visited her in her box at the Opéra; then they would agree upon a meeting at such or such a house, to which chance led them at the same hour. He knew the evenings that she did not go out and would call then to have a cup of tea with her, feeling himself at home even near the folds of her dress, so tenderly and surely settled in that ripened affection, so fixed in the habit of seeing her somewhere, of spending a few moments by her side.

The desire for family life, for a bright, cheerful household, for the family table, for those evenings when one talks without exertion to old friends, that desire for contact, for familiarity, for human intercourse which dwells dormant in every human heart, and which every old bachelor carries from door to door to his friends, where he installs something of himself, added a strain of egoism to his sentiments of affection. In that house, where he was loved and spoiled, where he found everything, he could still rest and coddle his loneliness.

For three days he had not seen his friends, who were probably very much occupied with the return of the daughter of the house; and he was already feeling bored and even a little offended because they had not sent for him sooner, but not wishing, as a matter of discretion, to be the first to make an approach.

The countess' letter aroused him like the lash of a whip. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. He

decided to go immediately to her house, that he might find her before she went out.

The valet appeared in answer to the bell.

"What sort of weather is it, Joseph?"

"Very fine, monsieur."

"Warm?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"White waistcoat, blue jacket, gray hat."

He always dressed fastidiously, but although his tailor turned him out in correct style, the very way in which he wore his clothes, his manner of walking, his comfortable proportions encased in a white waistcoat, his high gray felt hat, tilted a little toward the back of his head, seemed to reveal at once that he was both an artist and a bachelor.

When he reached the countess' house he was told that she was dressing for a drive in the Bois. He was a little vexed at this and waited.

According to his habit, he began to pace to and fro in the drawing-room, going from one seat to another or from the windows to the wall in the large drawing-room darkened by the curtains. On the light tables with gilded feet trifles of various kinds, useless, pretty and costly, lay scattered about in studied disorder. There were little antique boxes of chased gold, miniature snuff-boxes, ivory statuettes, objects in dull silver, quite modern, of an exaggerated severity, in which English taste appeared: a diminutive kitchen stove and upon it a cat drinking from a pan, a cigarette-case simulating a loaf of bread, a coffee-pot to hold matches, and in a casket a complete set of doll's jewelry—necklace, bracelets, rings, brooches, earrings set with diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, a microscopic fancy that

seemed to have been executed by Lilliputian jewelers.

From time to time he touched some object given by himself on some anniversary. He lifted it, handled it, examining it with dreamy indifference, then put it back in its place.

In one corner some books that were luxuriously bound, but seldom opened, lay within easy reach on a round table with a single leg for a foundation, which stood before a little curved sofa. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* lay there also, somewhat worn, with turned-down pages, as if it had been read and reread many times; other publications lay near it, some of them uncut: the *Arts modernes,* which is bought only because of its cost, the subscription price being four hundred francs a year, and the *Feuille libre,* a thin volume between blue covers, in which appear the more recent poets called *"les enervés."*

Between the windows stood the countess' writing-desk, a coquettish piece of furniture of the last century, on which she wrote replies to those hurried questions handed to her during her receptions. A few books were on that also, familiar books, index to the heart and mind of a woman: Musset, Manon Lescaut, Werther, and to show that she was not a stranger to the complicated sensations and mysteries of psychology, *Les Fleurs du Mal, Le Rouge et le Noir, La Femme au XVIIIe Siècle, Adolphe.*

Beside the books lay a charming hand-mirror, a masterpiece of the silversmith's art, the glass being turned down upon a square of embroidered velvet, in order to allow one to admire the curious gold and silver workmanship on the back. Bertin took it up

and looked at his own reflection. For some years he had been growing terribly old in appearance, and although he thought that his face showed more originality than when he was younger, the sight of his heavy cheeks and increasing wrinkles saddened him.

A door opened behind him.

"Good-morning, Monsieur Bertin," said Annette.

"Good-morning, little one. Are you well?"

"Very well; and you?"

"What, are you not saying 'thou' to me, then, after all?"

"No, indeed! It would really embarrass me."

"Nonsense!"

"Yes, it would. You make me feel timid."

"And why, pray?"

"Because—because you are neither young enough nor old enough——"

The painter laughed.

"After such a reason as that I will insist no more."

She blushed suddenly, up to the white brow, where the waves of hair began to ripple, and resumed with an air of slight confusion:

"Mamma told me to say to you that she will be down immediately and to ask you whether you will go to the Bois de Boulogne with us."

"Yes, certainly. You are alone?"

"No; with the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Very well; I will go."

"Then, if you will allow me, I will go and put on my hat."

"Yes, go, my child."

As Annette left the room the countess entered, veiled, ready to set forth. She extended her hands.

"We never see you any more. What are you doing?" she inquired.

"I did not wish to trouble you just at this time," said Bertin.

In the tone with which she spoke the word "Olivier!" she expressed all her reproaches and all her attachment.

"You are the best woman in the world," he said, touched by the tender intonation of his name.

This little quarrel being settled, the countess resumed her light society tone.

"We shall pick up the duchess at her hôtel and then make a tour of the Bois. We must show all that sort of thing to Nanette, you know."

The landau awaited them under the porte-cochère.

Bertin seated himself facing the two ladies, and the carriage departed, the pawing of the horses making a resonant sound against the over-arching roof of the porte-cochère.

Along the grand boulevard descending toward the Madeleine all the gaiety of the springtime seemed to have fallen upon the tide of humanity.

The soft air and the sunshine lent to the men a festive air, to the women a suggestion of love. The bakers' boys deposited their baskets on the benches to run and play with their brethren, the street urchins; the dogs appeared in a great hurry to go somewhere; the canaries hanging in the boxes of the concierges trilled loudly; only the ancient cab horses kept their usual sedate pace.

"Oh, what a beautiful day! How good it is to live!" murmured the countess.

The painter contemplated both mother and daughter in the dazzling light. Certainly they were differ-

ent, but at the same time so much alike that the latter was veritably a continuation of the former, made of the same blood, the same flesh, animated by the same life. Their eyes, above all, those blue eyes flecked with tiny black dots of such a brilliant blue in the daughter, a little faded in the mother, fixed upon him a look so similar that he expected to hear them make the same replies. And he was surprised to discover, as he made them laugh and talk, that before him were two very distinct women, one who had lived and one who was about to live. No, he did not foresee what would become of that child when her young mind, influenced by tastes and instincts that were as yet dormant, should have expanded and developed amid the life of the world. This was a pretty little new person, ready for adventures and for love, unknown and ignorant, who was sailing out of port like a vessel, while her mother was returning, having passed through life and having loved!

He was touched at the thought that she had chosen himself, and that she preferred him still, this woman, who had remained so pretty, rocked in that landau, in the warm air of springtime.

As he expressed his gratitude to her in a glance, she divined it, and he thought he could feel her thanks in the rustle of her robe.

In his turn he murmured: "Oh, yes, what a beautiful day!"

When they had taken up the duchess in the Rue de Varenne they spun along at a swift pace toward the Invalides, crossed the Seine and reached the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, going up toward the

Arc de triomphe de l'Etoile in the midst of a sea of carriages.

The young girl was seated beside Olivier, riding backward, and she opened wide upon this stream of equipages eager, innocent eyes. Occasionally, when the duchess and the countess acknowledged a bow with a short movement of the head, she would ask, "Who is that?" Bertin answered: "The Pontaiglin," "the Puicelci," "the Comtesse de Lochrist" or "the beautiful Madame Mandelière."

Now they were following the Avenue of the Bois de Boulogne, amid the noise and rattling of wheels. The carriages, a little less crowded than below the Arc de Triomphe, seemed to struggle in an endless race. The cabs, the heavy landaus, the solemn eight-spring vehicles, passed one another over and over again, distanced suddenly by a rapid victoria, drawn by a single trotter, bearing along at a reckless pace, through all that rolling throng, *bourgeois* and aristocratic, through all societies, all classes, all hierarchies, an indolent young woman, whose bright and striking toilette diffused among the carriages it touched in passing a strange perfume of some unknown flower.

"Who is that lady?" Annette inquired.

"I don't know," said Bertin, at which reply the duchess and the countess exchanged a smile.

The leaves were opening, the familiar nightingales of that Parisian garden were singing already among the tender verdure, and when, as the carriage approached the lake, it joined the long file of other vehicles at a walk, there was an incessant exchange of salutations, smiles and friendly words as the wheels touched. The procession seemed now like

a fleet of boats gliding along in which were seated very well-bred ladies and gentlemen. The duchess, who was bowing incessantly in response to raised hats or inclined heads, appeared to be passing them in review, calling to mind what she knew, thought or supposed of these people as they defiled before her.

"Look, dearest, there is the lovely Madame Mandelière again—the beauty of the Republic."

In a light and dashing carriage the beauty of the Republic, apparently indifferent to this undisputed fame, allowed herself to be admired, her large dark eyes, her low brow beneath a veil of dusky hair and her mouth, which was a shade too obstinate in its lines.

"Very beautiful, all the same," said Bertin.

The countess did not like to hear him praise other women. She shrugged her shoulders slightly, but said nothing.

But the young girl, in whom the instinct of rivalry suddenly awoke, ventured to say: "I do not find her beautiful at all."

"What! You do not think her beautiful?" said the painter.

"No; she looks as if she had been dipped in ink."

The duchess, delighted, burst into laughter.

"Bravo, little one!" she cried. "For the last six years half the men in Paris have been swooning at the feet of that negress! I believe that they are making fun of us. Look at the Comtesse de Lochrist instead."

Alone, in a landau with a white poodle, the countess, delicate as a miniature, a blonde with brown eyes, whose grace and beauty had served for five or six years as the theme for the admiration of

her partisans, bowed to the ladies with a fixed smile on her lips.

But Nanette exhibited no greater enthusiasm than before.

"Oh," she said, "she is no longer young!"

Bertin, who usually did not at all agree with the countess in the daily discussions of these two rivals, felt a sudden irritation at the stupid intolerance of this little simpleton.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Whether one likes her or not, she is charming; and I only hope that you may become as pretty as she."

"Pooh! pooh!" said the duchess. "You notice women only after they have passed the thirtieth year. The child is right. You admire only *passée* beauty."

"Pardon me!" he exclaimed; "a woman is really beautiful only after maturing, when the expression of her face has become fully developed!"

He enlarged upon this idea that the first youthful freshness is only the veneer of riper beauty; he demonstrated that men of the world were wise in paying but little attention to young girls in their first season and that they were right in proclaiming them beautiful only when they had passed into their later period of bloom.

The countess, flattered, murmured: "He is right; he speaks as an artist. The youthful countenance is very charming, but it is always a trifle commonplace."

The painter continued to urge his point, indicating at what moment a face that was losing, little by little, the undecided grace of youth, really as-

sumed its definite form, its true character and physiognomy.

At each word the countess said "Yes" with a little nod of conviction, and the more he affirmed, with all the heat of a lawyer making a plea, with the animation of the accused pleading his own cause, the more she approved, by glance and gesture, as if they two were allied against some danger and must defend themselves against some false and menacing opinion. Annette hardly heard them, she was so engrossed in looking about her. Her usually smiling face had become grave and she said no more, carried away by the pleasure of the rapid driving. The sunlight, the trees, the carriage, this delightful life, so rich and gay—all this was for her!

Every day she might come here, recognized in her turn, saluted and envied, and perhaps the men, in pointing her out to one another, would say that she was beautiful. She noticed all those that appeared to her distinguished among the throng and inquired their names, without thinking of anything beyond the mere sound of the syllables, though sometimes they awoke in her an echo of respect and admiration, when she realized that she had seen them often in the newspapers or heard stories concerning them. She could not become accustomed to this long procession of celebrities; it seemed unreal to her, as if she were a part of some stage spectacle. The cabs filled her with disdain mingled with disgust; they annoyed and irritated her, and suddenly she said:

"I think they should not allow anything but private carriages to come here."

"Indeed, mademoiselle!" said Bertin; "and then what becomes of our equality, liberty and fraternity?"

Annette made a *moue* that signified "Don't talk about that!" and continued:

"They should have a separate Bois for cabs—that of Vincennes, for instance."

"You are behind the times, little one, and evidently do not know that we are swimming in the full tide of democracy. But, if you wish to see this place free from any mingling of the middle class, come in the morning, and then you will find only the fine flower of society."

He proceeded to describe graphically, as he knew well how to do, the Bois in the morning hours with its gay cavaliers and fair Amazons, that club where every one knows every one else by their Christian names, their pet names, their family connections, titles, qualities and vices, as if they all lived in the same neighborhood or in the same small town.

"Do you come here often at that hour?" Annette inquired.

"Very often. There is no more charming place in Paris."

"Do you come on horseback in the mornings?"

"Yes."

"And in the afternoon you pay visits?"

"Yes."

"Then, when do you work?"

"Oh, I work—sometimes; and besides, you see, I have chosen a special entertainment suited to my tastes. As I paint the portraits of beautiful women, it is necessary that I should see them and follow them everywhere."

"On foot and on horseback!" murmured Annette with a perfectly serious face.

He threw her a sidelong glance of appreciation, which seemed to say: "Ah! you are witty, even now! You will do very well."

A breath of cold air from far away, from the country that was hardly awake as yet, swept over the park, and the whole Bois, coquettish, frivolous and fashionable, shivered under its chill. For some seconds it caused the tender leaves to tremble on the trees and the garments on shoulders. All the women, with almost simultaneous movement, drew up over their arms and chests their wraps lying behind them, and the horses began to trot, from one end of the avenue to the other, as if the keen wind had flicked them like a whip.

The countess' party returned quickly, to the silvery jingle of the harness, under the slanting red rays of the setting sun.

"Are you going home?" inquired the countess of Bertin, with whose habits she was familiar.

"No, I am going to the club."

"Then, shall we set you down there in passing?"

"Thank you, that will be very kind."

"And when will you invite us to breakfast with the duchess?"

"Name your day."

This painter in ordinary to the fair Parisians, whom his admirers christened "a Watteau realist" and his detractors a "photographer of gowns and mantles," often received at breakfast or at dinner the beautiful persons whose features he had reproduced, as well as the celebrated and the well known,

who found these little entertainments in a bachelor's establishment very amusing.

"The day after to-morrow, then. Will the day after to-morrow suit you, my dear duchess?" asked Madame de Guilleroy.

"Yes, indeed; you are charming! Monsieur Bertin never thinks of me when he has his little parties. It is quite evident that I am no longer young."

The countess, accustomed to consider the artist's home almost the same as her own, replied:

"Only we four, the four of the landau—the duchess, Annette, you and I, eh, great artist?"

"Only ourselves," said he, alighting from the carriage, "and I will have prepared for you some crabs *à l'alsacienne*."

"Oh, you will make a gourmande of the little one!"

He bowed to them, standing beside the carriage door, then entered quickly the vestibule of the main entrance to the club, threw his topcoat and cane to a group of footmen, who had risen like soldiers at the passing of an officer; mounted the broad stairway, meeting another brigade of servants in knee breeches, pushed open a door, feeling himself suddenly as alert as a young man, as he heard at the end of the corridor a continuous clash of foils, the sound of stamping feet and loud exclamations: *"Touché!" "A moi!" "Passé!" "J'en ai!" "Touché!" "A vous!"*

In the fencing-hall the swordsmen, dressed in gray linen, with leather vests, their trousers tight around the ankles, a sort of apron falling over the front of the body, one arm in the air, the hand thrown backward, and in the other hand, enormous

in a large fencing-glove, the thin flexible foil, extended and withdrawn with the agile swiftness of mechanical jumping-jacks.

Others rested and chatted, still out of breath, red and perspiring, with handkerchief in hand to wipe off faces and necks; others, seated on a square divan that ran along the four sides of the hall, watched the fencing—Liverdy against Landa and the master of the club, Taillade, against the tall Rocdiane.

Bertin, smiling, quite at home, shook hands with several men.

"I choose you!" cried the Baron de Baverie.

"I am with you, my dear fellow," said Bertin, passing into the dressing-room to prepare himself.

He had not felt so agile and vigorous for a long time, and, guessing that he should fence well that day, he hurried as impatiently as a schoolboy ready for play. As soon as he stood before his adversary he attacked him with great ardor, and in ten minutes he had touched him eleven times and had so fatigued him that the baron cried for quarter. Then he fenced with Punisimont and with his colleague, Amaury Maldant.

The cold douche that followed, freezing his pulsating flesh, reminded him of the baths of his twentieth year, when he used to plunge head first into the Seine from the birdges in the suburbs, in order to amaze the *bourgeois* passers-by.

"Shall you dine here?" inquired Maldant.

"Yes."

"We have a table with Liverdy, Rocdiane and Landa; make haste; it is a quarter past seven."

The dining-room was full and there was a continuous hum of men's voices.

There were all the nocturnal bohemians of Paris, idlers and workers, all those who from seven o'clock in the evening know not what to do and dine at the club, ready to catch at anything or anybody that chance may offer to amuse them.

When the five friends were seated the banker Liverdy, a vigorous and hearty man of forty, said to Bertin:

"You were in fine form this evening."

"Yes, I could have done surprising things to-day," Bertin replied.

The other smiled, and the landscape painter, Amaury Maldant, a thin little bald-headed man with a gray beard, said with a sly expression:

"I too, always feel a rising of the sap in April; it makes me bring forth a few leaves—half a dozen at most—then it runs into sentiment; there never is any fruit."

The Marquis de Rocdiane and the Comte Landa sympathized with him. Both were older than he, though even a keen eye could not guess their age. Clubmen, horsemen, swordsmen, whose incessant exercise had given them bodies of steel, they boasted of being younger in every way than the enervated good-for-nothings of the new generation.

Rocdiane, of good family, with the *entrée* to all salons, though suspected of financial intrigues of many kinds (which, according to Bertin, was not surprising, since he had lived so much in the gaming houses), married, but separated from his wife, who paid him an annuity, a director of Belgian and Portuguese banks, carried boldly upon his energetic, Don Quixote-like face the somewhat tarnished

honor of a gentleman, which was occasionally brightened by the blood from a thrust in a duel.

The Comte de Landa, a good-natured colossus, proud of his figure and his shoulders, although married and the father of two children, found it difficult to dine at home three times a week; he remained at the club on the other days, with his friends, after the session in the fencing-hall.

"The club is a family," he said, "the family of those who as yet have none, of those who never will have one and of those who are bored by their own."

The conversation branched off on the subject of women, glided from anecdotes to reminiscences, from reminiscences to boasts, and then to indiscreet confidences.

The Marquis de Rocdiane allowed the names of his inamoratas to be guessed by unmistakable hints —society women whose names he did not utter, so that their identity might be the better surmised. The banker Liverdy indicated his flames by their first names. He would say: "I was at that time the best of friends with ——. Now, one evening when I was leaving her, I said to her, 'My little Marguerite' "—then he checked himself, amid the smiles of his fellows, adding: "Ha! I let something slip. One should form a habit of calling all women Sophie."

Olivier Bertin, very reserved, was accustomed to declare when questioned:

"For my part, I content myself with my models."

They pretended to believe him, and Landa, who was frankly a libertine, grew quite excited at the idea of all the pretty creatures that walked the streets

and all the young persons who posed undraped before the painter at ten francs an hour.

As the bottles became empty, all these graybeards, as the younger members of the club called them, grew very red in the face, and their kindling ardor awakened new desires.

Rocdiane, after the coffee, became still more indiscreet, and forgot the society women to celebrate the charms of simple *cocottes*.

"Paris!" said he, a glass of kümmel in his hand, "the only city where a man never grows old, the only one where, at fifty, if he is sound and well preserved, he will always find a young girl, as pretty as an angel, to love him."

Landa, finding again his Rocdiane after the liqueurs, applauded him enthusiastically and mentioned the young girls who still adored him every day.

But Liverdy, more sceptical, and pretending to know exactly what women were worth, murmured: "Yes, they tell you that they adore you!"

"They prove it to me, my dear fellow," exclaimed Landa.

"Such proofs don't count."

"They suffice me!"

"But, *sacrebleu!* they do mean it," cried Rocdiane. "Do you believe that a pretty little creature of twenty, who has been going the rounds in Paris for five or six years already, where all our mustaches have taught her kisses and spoiled her taste for them, still knows how to distinguish a man of thirty from a man of sixty? Pshaw! what nonsense! She has seen and known too many of them. Now, I'll wager that, down in the bottom of her heart,

she actually prefers an old banker to a young stripling. Does she know or reflect upon that? Have men any age here? Oh, my dear fellow, we grow young as we grow gray, and the whiter our hair becomes the more they tell us they love us, the more they show it and the more they believe it."

They rose from the table, their blood warmed and lashed by alcohol, ready to make any conquest; and they began to deliberate how to spend the evening, Bertin mentioning the Cirque, Rocdiane the Hippodrome, Maldant the Eden and Landa the Folies-Bergère, when a light and distant sound of the tuning of violins reached their ears.

"Ah, there is music at the club to-day, it seems," said Rocdiane.

"Yes," Bertin replied. "Shall we listen for ten minutes before going out?"

"Agreed."

They crossed a salon, a billiard-room, a card-room and finally reached a sort of box over the gallery of the musicians. Four gentlemen, ensconced in armchairs, were waiting there already, in easy attitudes, while below, among rows of empty seats, a dozen others were chatting, sitting or standing.

The conductor tapped his desk with his bow; the music began.

Olivier adored music as an opium-eater adores opium. It made him dream.

As soon as the sonorous wave from the instruments reached him he felt himself borne away in a sort of nervous intoxication, which thrilled body and mind indescribably. His imagination ran riot, made drunk by melody, and carried him along through sweet dreams and charming reveries. With

closed eyes, legs crossed and folded arms, he listened to the strains and gave himself up to the visions that passed before his eyes and into his mind.

The orchestra was playing one of Haydn's symphonies, and when Bertin's eyelids drooped over his eyes he saw again the Bois, the crowd of carriages around him and facing him in the landau the countess and her daughter. He heard their voices, followed their words, felt the movement of the carriage, inhaled the air, filled with the odor of young leaves.

Three times his neighbor, speaking to him, interrupted this vision, which three times he began again, as the rolling of the vessel seems to continue when, after crossing the ocean, one lies motionless in bed.

Then it extended itself to a long voyage, with the two women always seated before him, sometimes on the railway, again at the table of strange hotels. During the whole execution of the symphony they accompanied him, as if, while driving with him in the sunshine, they had left the image of their two faces imprinted on his vision.

Silence followed. Then came a noise of seats being moved and chattering of voices, which dispelled this vapor of a dream, and he perceived, dozing around him, his four friends, relaxed from a listening attitude to the comfortable posture of sleep.

"Well, what shall we do now?" he asked, after he had roused them.

"I should like to sleep here a little longer," replied Rocdiane frankly.

"And I too," said Landa.

Bertin rose.

"Well, I shall go home," he said. "I am rather tired."

He felt very lively, on the contrary, but he wished to go, fearing the end of the evening around the baccarat-table, which he knew so well.

He went home, therefore, and the following day, after a restless night, one of those nights that put artists in that condition of cerebral activity called inspiration, he decided not to go out, but to work until evening.

It was an excellent day, one of those days of facile production, when ideas seem to descend into the hands and form upon the canvas of their own accord.

With doors shut, far from the world, in the quiet of his own dwelling, closed to everyone, in the friendly peace of his studio, with clear eye, lucid mind, enthusiastic, alert, he tasted that happiness given only to artists, the happiness of bringing forth their work in joy. Nothing existed any more for him in such hours of work except the piece of canvas on which was born an image under the caress of his brush; and he experienced, in these crises of productiveness, a strange and delicious sensation of abounding life which intoxicated him. When evening came he was exhausted as by healthful fatigue, and went to sleep with agreeable anticipation of his breakfast the next morning.

The table was covered with flowers, the *menu* was carefully chosen for Madame de Guilleroy's sake, as she was a refined epicure; and in spite of a strong but brief resistance, the painter compelled his guests to drink champagne.

"The little one will get intoxicated," protested the countess.

"Dear me! there must be a first time," replied the indulgent duchess.

Everyone, as the party returned to the studio, felt exhilarated by a buoyancy of spirits in which one seems to soar as though the feet had wings.

The duchess and the countess, having to attend a meeting of the Committee of French Mothers, were to take Annette home before going to the meeting; but Bertin offered to take her for a walk, and then to the Boulevard Malesherbes; so both ladies left them.

"Let us take the longest way," said Annette.

"Would you like to stroll about the Monceau Park?" asked Bertin. "It is a very pretty place; we will look at the babies and nurses."

"Yes, I should like that."

They walked along the Avenue Velasquez and entered the immense gilded gate that serves as an emblem and an entrance to that exquisite jewel of a park, displaying in the heart of Paris its verdant and artificial beauty, surrounded by a belt of princely mansions.

Along the wide walks, which unroll their massive and artistic curves through grassy lawns, throngs of people, sitting on iron chairs, watch the passers-by; while in the little shady paths, winding like streams, groups of children crawl in the sand, run about, or jump the rope under the indolent eyes of nurses or the anxious watchfulness of mothers. The enormous trees, rounded into domes, like monuments of leaves, huge horse-chestnuts, whose heavy verdure is lighted up by red and white clusters, the showy sycamores, the graceful plane-trees with their

trunks artificially twisted, add to the charming perspective of large undulating lawns.

The weather was warm, the turtle-doves were cooing among the branches, and flying to meet one another from the tree-tops, while the sparrows bathed in the rainbow formed by the sunshine and the spray thrown over the smooth turf. White statues on their pedestals seemed happy in the midst of the green freshness. A little marble boy was drawing from his foot an invisible thorn, as if he had just pricked himself in running after the Diana fleeing toward the little lake imprisoned in the woods that screen the ruins of a temple.

Other statues, amorous and cold, embraced one another on the borders of the groves, or dreamed there, their hands clasping one knee. A cascade foamed and rolled over the pretty rocks; a tree, truncated like a column, supported an ivy; a tombstone bore an inscription. The stone shafts erected on the lawns hardly suggest the Acropolis any more than this elegant little park recalls wild forests. It is the charming and artificial place where city people go to look at flowers grown in hot-houses, and to admire, as one admires the spectacle of life at the theatre, that agreeable representation of the beauties of nature given in the heart of Paris.

Olivier Bertin had come almost every day for years to this favorite spot to look at the fair Parisians moving in their appropriate setting. "It is a park made for toilettes," he would say; "badly dressed people are horrible in it." He would rove about there for hours, knowing all the plants and all the habitual visitors.

He now strolled beside Annette along the ave-

nues, his eye distracted by the motley and animated crowd in the gardens.

"Oh, the little love!" exclaimed Annette. She was gazing at a tiny boy with blond curls, who was looking at her with his blue eyes full of surprise and delight.

Then she passed all the children in review, and the pleasure she felt in seeing those living dolls, decked out in their dainty ribbons, made her talkative and communicative.

She walked slowly, chatting to Bertin, giving him her reflections on the children, the nurses, and the mothers. The larger children drew from her little exclamations of joy, while the little pale ones touched her sympathy.

Bertin listened, more amused by her than by the little ones, and, always remembering his work, he murmured, "That is delicious!" thinking that he must make an exquisite picture, with one corner of this park and a bouquet of nurses, mothers and children. Why had he never thought of it before?

"You like those little ones?" he inquired.

"I adore them!"

He felt, from her manner of looking at them, that she longed to take them in her arms, to hug and kiss them—the natural and tender longing of a future mother; and he was surprised at this secret instinct hidden in this little woman.

As she appeared ready to talk, he questioned her about her tastes. She admitted, with pretty naïveté, that she had hopes of social success and glory, and that she desired to have fine horses, which she understood almost as well as a horse-dealer, for a part of the farm at Roncières was devoted to

breeding; but she appeared to trouble her head no more about a *fiancé* than one is concerned about an apartment, which is always to be found among the multitude of houses to rent.

They approached the lake, where two swans and six ducks were quietly floating, as clean and calm as porcelain birds, and they passed before a young woman sitting on a chair, with an open book lying on her knees, her eyes gazing upward, her soul having apparently taken flight in a dream.

She was as motionless as a wax figure. Plain, humble, dressed as a modest girl who has no thought of pleasing, she had gone to the land of Dreams, carried away by a phrase or a word that had bewitched her heart. Undoubtedly she was continuing, according to the impulse of her hopes, the adventure begun in the book.

Bertin paused, surprised. "How beautiful to dream like that!" said he.

They had passed before her; now they turned and passed her again without her perceiving them, so absorbed was she in the distant flight of her thought.

"Tell me, little one," said the painter to Annette, "would it bore you very much to pose for me once or twice?"

"No, indeed! Quite the contrary."

"Look well at that young lady who is roaming in the world of fancy."

"The lady there, in that chair?"

"Yes. Well, you, too, will sit on a chair, you will have an open book on your knee, and you will try to do as she does. Have you ever had any day-dreams?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What about?"

He tried to confess her as to her aerial flights, but she would make no reply, evaded his questions, looked at the ducks, swimming after some bread thrown to them by a lady, and seemed embarrassed, as if he had touched upon a subject that was a sensitive point with her.

Then, to change the conversation, she talked about her life at Roncières, spoke of her grandmother, to whom she read aloud a long time every day, and who must now feel very lonely and sad.

As he listened, the painter felt as gay as a bird, gay as he never had been. All that she had said, all the doings, the trifling everyday details of the simple life of a young girl, amused and interested him.

"Let us sit down," he said.

They seated themselves near the water, and the two swans came sailing toward them, expecting some fresh dainty.

Bertin felt recollections awakening within him—those vanished memories that are drowned in forgetfulness, and which suddenly return, one knows not why. They surged up rapidly, all kinds, and so numerous at the same time that it seemed to him a hand was stirring the miry depths of his memory.

He tried to guess the reason of this rising to the surface of his former life which he had felt and remarked on previous occasions, but never so insistently as to-day. A cause always existed for these sudden recollections—a natural and simple cause, an odor, perhaps, often a perfume. How many times a woman's draperies, with the evaporating breath

of some essence, had brought to him in passing, a host of forgotten events. At the bottom of old perfume-bottles he had often found bits of his former existence; and all wandering odors—of streets, fields, houses, furniture, sweet or unsavory, the warm odors of summer evenings, the cold breath of winter nights, revived within him far-off reminiscences, as if odors retained embalmed dead-and-gone memories, as spices preserve mummies.

Was it the damp grass or the chestnut blossoms that thus revivified the past? No. What, then?

Was it his eye to which he owed this susceptibility? What had he seen? Nothing. Among the persons he had met, perhaps one might have resembled some one he had known, and, although he had not recognized it, it might have rung in his heart all the chords of the past.

Was it not a sound, rather? Very often he had heard by chance a piano, an unknown voice, even a hand-organ in the street playing some old air, which had suddenly made him feel twenty years younger, filling his breast with tender recollections, long buried.

But this appeal, continued, incessant, intangible, almost irritating! What was there near him to revive thus his extinct emotions?

"It is growing a little cool; we must go home," he said.

They rose, and resumed their walk.

He looked at the poor people sitting on benches, for whom a chair was too great an expense.

Annette also observed them, and felt disturbed at the thought of their lives, their occupations, surprised that they should come to lounge in this beau-

tiful public garden, when their own appearance was so forlorn.

More than ever was Olivier now dreaming over past years. It seemed to him that a fly was humming in his ear, filling it with a buzzing song of bygone days.

The young girl, observing his dreamy air, asked: "What is the matter? You seem sad."

His heart thrilled within him. Who had said that? She or her mother? Not her mother with her present voice but with her voice of long ago, so changed that he had only just recognized it.

"Nothing," he replied, smiling. "You entertain me very much; you are very charming, and you remind me of your mother."

How was it that he had not sooner remarked this strange echo of a voice once so familiar, now coming from these fresh lips?

"Go on talking," he said.

"Of what?"

"Tell me what your teachers have taught you. Did you like them?"

She began again to chat pleasantly. He listened, stirred by a growing anxiety; he watched and waited to detect, among the phrases of this young girl, almost a stranger to his heart, a word, a sound, a laugh, that seemed to have been imprisoned in her throat since her mother's youth. Certain intonations made him tremble with astonishment. Of course there were differences in their tones, the resemblance of which he had not remarked immediately, and which were in some ways so dissimilar that he had not confounded them at all; but these differences rendered all the more striking this sud-

den reproduction of the maternal speech. He had noted their facial resemblance with a friendly and curious eye, but now the mystery of this resuscitated voice mingled them in such a way that, turning away his head that he might no longer see the young girl, he asked himself whether it were not the countess who was speaking thus to him, twelve years earlier.

Then when he had woven this hallucination, he turned toward her again, and found, as their eyes met, a little of that shy hesitation with which the mother's gaze had met his in the first days of their friendship.

They had already walked three times round the park, passing always before the same persons, the same nurses and children.

Annette was now inspecting the buildings surrounding the garden, inquiring the names of their owners. She wished to know all about them, asked questions with eager curiosity, seeming to fill her feminine mind with these details, and, with interested face, listening with her eyes as much as with her ears.

But when they arrived at the pavilion that separates the two gates of the outer boulevard, Bertin perceived that it was almost four o'clock.

"Oh," he said, "we must go home."

They walked slowly toward the Boulevard Malesherbes.

After the painter had left Annette at her home he proceeded toward the Place de la Concorde.

He sang to himself softly, longed to run, and would have been glad to jump over the benches, so agile did he feel. Paris seemed radiant to him, more beautiful than ever. "Decidedly the spring-

time casts a glamor over the whole world," was his reflection.

He was in one of those periods of mental excitement when one understands everything with more pleasure, when the vision is clearer and more comprehensive, when one feels a keener joy in seeing and feeling, as if an all-powerful hand had brightened all the colors of earth, reanimated all living creatures, and had wound up in us, as in a watch that has stopped, the activity of sensation.

He thought, as his glance took in a thousand amusing things: "And I said that there were moments when I could no longer find subjects to paint!"

He felt such a sensation of freedom and clear-sightedness that all his artistic work seemed commonplace to him, and he conceived a new way of expressing life, truer and more original; and suddenly he was seized with a desire to return home and work, so he retraced his steps and shut himself up in his studio.

But as soon as he was alone, before a newly begun picture, the ardor that had burned in his blood began to cool. He felt tired, sat down on his divan, and again gave himself up to dreaming.

The sort of happy indifference in which he lived, that carelessness of the satisfied man whose almost every need is gratified, was leaving his heart by degrees, as if something were still lacking. He realized that his house was empty and his studio deserted. Then, looking round him, he fancied he saw pass by him the shadow of a woman whose presence was sweet.

He got up, unable to sit quietly any longer, and

began to walk, thinking again that, in spite of this intimacy that had so filled his life, he still remained alone, always alone. After the long hours of work, when he looked around him, dazed as one who reawakens and returns to life, he saw and felt only walls within reach of his hand and voice. Not having any woman in his home, and not being able to meet the one he loved except with the precautions of a thief, he had been compelled to spend his leisure time in public places where one finds or purchases the means of killing time. He was accustomed to going to the club, to the Cirque and the Hippodrome on fixed days, to the Opéra, and to all sorts of places, so that he should not be compelled to go home, where no doubt he would have lived in perfect happiness had he only had her beside him.

Formerly, in certain hours of tender passion, he had suffered cruelly because he could not take her and keep her with him; then, as his ardor cooled, he had accepted quietly their separation and his own liberty; now he regretted those past hours, as though his love were being renewed. And this return of tenderness invaded his heart so suddenly, almost without reason, because the weather was fine, and possibly because a little while ago he had recognized the rejuvenated voice of that woman! How slight a thing it takes to move a man's heart, a man who is gradually growing old, with whom remembrance turns into regret!

As in former days, the need of seeing her again came to him, entering body and mind, like a fever; and he began to think after the fashion of a young lover, exalting her in his heart, and feeling himself exalted in his desire for her; then he decided, al-

though he had seen her only that morning, to go and ask for a cup of tea that same evening.

The hours seemed long to him, and as he set out for the Boulevard Malesherbes he was seized with a fear of not finding her, which would force him to pass another evening alone, as he had passed so many others.

To his query: "Is the countess at home?" the servant's answer, "Yes, monsieur," filled him with joy.

He said, with a radiant air: "Here I am again!" as he appeared at the threshold of the smaller drawing-room where the two ladies were working, under the pink shade of a double lamp of English metal, on a high and slender stem.

"What, is it you? How fortunate!" exclaimed the countess.

"Well, yes. I felt very lonely, so I came."

"How nice of you!"

"You are expecting someone?"

"No—perhaps—I never know."

He had seated himself and now looked scornfully at the piece of coarse gray knitting that mother and daughter were swiftly making from heavy wool, working with long needles.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Coverlets."

"For the poor?"

"Yes, of course."

"It is very ugly."

"It is very warm."

"Possibly, but it is very ugly, especially in a Louis Fifteenth apartment, where everything else charms the eye. If not for the sake of your poor,

at least for the sake of your friends, you really ought to make your charities more elegant."

"Oh, heavens, these men!" said the countess, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Why, everyone is making this kind of coverlet just now."

"I know that; I know it only too well! One cannot make an evening call now without seeing that frightful gray stuff dragged over the prettiest gowns and the most elegant furniture. Bad taste seems to be the fashion this spring."

To judge whether he spoke the truth, the countess spread out her knitting on a silk-covered chair beside her; then she assented indifferently:

"Yes, you are right—it is ugly."

Then she resumed her work. Upon the two bent heads fell a stream of light; a rosy radiance from the lamp illumined their hair and complexions, extending to their skirts and their moving fingers. They watched their work with that attention, light but continuous, given by women to this labor of the fingers which the eye follows without a thought.

At the four corners of the room four other lamps of Chinese porcelain, borne by antique columns of gilded wood, shed upon the hangings a soft, even light, modified by lace shades thrown over the globes.

Bertin took a very low seat, a dwarf armchair, in which he could barely seat himself, but which he had always preferred when talking with the countess because it placed him almost at her feet.

"You took a long walk with Nané this afternoon in the park," said the countess.

"Yes. We chatted like old friends. I like your daughter very much. She resembles you very

strongly. When she pronounces certain phrases, one would believe that you had left your voice in her mouth."

"My husband has already said that very often."

He watched the two women work, bathed in the lamplight, and the thought that had often made him suffer, and had done so that very day—the recollection of his desolate home, still, silent and cold, whatever the weather, whatever fire might be lighted in chimney or furnace—saddened him as if he now understood his isolation for the first time.

Oh, how deeply he longed to be the husband of this woman! Once he had wanted to carry her away, to take her from that man, to steal her altogether. To-day he was jealous of him, that husband who was installed beside her forever, in the habits of her household and under the sweet influence of her presence. In looking at her he felt his heart full of old things revived, of which he wished to speak. Certainly, he still loved her very much, even a little more to-day than he had for some time; and the desire to tell her of this return of youthful feeling, which would be sure to delight her, made him wish that she would send the young girl to bed as soon as possible.

Obsessed by this strong desire to be alone with her, to sit near her and lay his head on her knee, to take the hands from which would slip the quilt for the poor, the needles, and the ball of wool, which would roll under a sofa at the end of a long, unwound thread, he looked at the time, relapsed into almost complete silence, and thought that it was a great mistake to allow young girls to pass the evening with grown-up persons.

Presently a sound of footsteps was heard in the next room, and a servant appeared at the door announcing:

"Monsieur de Musadieu."

Olivier Bertin felt a spasm of anger, and when he shook hands with the Inspector of Fine Arts he had a great desire to take him by the shoulders and throw him into the street.

Musadieu was full of news; the ministry was about to fall, and there was a whisper of scandal about the Marquis de Rocdiane. He looked at the young girl, adding: "I will tell you about that a little later."

The countess raised her eyes to the clock and saw that it was about to strike ten.

"It is time to go to bed, my child," she said to her daughter.

Without replying, Annette folded her knitting-work, rolled up her ball of wool, kissed her mother on the cheeks, gave her hand to the two gentlemen, and left the room quietly, as if she glided away without disturbing the air as she went.

"Well, what is your scandal?" her mother demanded, as soon as she had gone.

It appeared that rumor said that the Marquis de Rocdiane, amicably separated from his wife, who paid to him an allowance that he considered insufficient, had discovered a sure if singular means to double it. The marquise, whom he had had watched, had been surprised *in flagrante delictu,* and was compelled to buy off, with an increased allowance, the legal proceedings instituted by the police commissioner.

The countess listened with curious gaze, her idle hands holding the interrupted work on her knee.

Bertin, who was still more exasperated by Musadieu's presence since Annette had gone, was incensed at this recital, and declared, with the indignation of one who had known of the scandal but did not wish to speak of it to any one, that the story was an odious falsehood, one of those shameful lies which people of their world ought neither to listen to nor repeat. He appeared greatly wrought up over the matter, as he stood leaning against the mantelpiece and speaking with the excited manner of a man disposed to make a personal question of the subject under discussion.

Rocdiane was his friend, he said; and, though he might be criticised for frivolity in certain respects, no one could justly accuse him or even suspect him of any really unworthy action. Musadieu, surprised and embarrassed, defended himself, tried to explain and to excuse himself.

"Allow me to say," he remarked at last, "that I heard this story just before I came here in the drawing-room of the Duchesse de Mortemain."

"Who told it to you? A woman, no doubt," said Bertin.

"No, not at all; it was the Marquis de Farandal."

The painter, irritated still further, retorted: "That does not astonish me—from him!"

There was a brief silence. The countess took up her work again. Presently Olivier said in a calmer voice: "I know for a fact that that story is false."

In reality he knew nothing whatever about it, having heard it mentioned then for the first time.

Musadieu thought it wise to prepare the way for

his retreat, feeling the situation rather dangerous, and he was just beginning to say that he must pay a visit at the Corbelles' that evening when the Comte de Guilleroy appeared, returning from dining in the city.

Bertin sat down again, overcome, and despairing now of getting rid of the husband.

"You haven't heard, have you, of the great scandal that is running all over town this evening?" inquired the count pleasantly.

As no one answered, he continued: "It seems that Rocdiane surprised his wife in a criminal situation and has made her pay dearly for her indiscretion."

Then Bertin, with his melancholy air, with grief in voice and gesture, placing one hand on Guilleroy's shoulder, repeated in a gentle and amicable manner all that he had just said so roughly to Musadieu.

The count, half convinced, annoyed to have allowed himself to repeat so lightly a doubtful and possibly compromising thing, pleaded his ignorance and his innocence. The gossips said so many false and wicked things!

Suddenly all agreed upon this statement: the world certainly accused, suspected and calumniated with deplorable facility! All four appeared to be convinced, during the next five minutes, that all the whispered scandals were lies; that the women did not have the lovers ascribed to them; that the men never committed the sins they were accused of; and, in short, that the outward appearance of things was usually much worse than the real situation.

Bertin, who no longer felt vexed with Musadieu since De Guilleroy's arrival, was now very pleasant

to him, led him to talk on his favorite subjects and opened the sluices of his eloquence. The count wore the contented air of a man who carries everywhere with him an atmosphere of peace and cordiality.

Two servants noiselessly entered the drawing-room, bearing the tea-table, on which the boiling water steamed in a pretty, shining kettle over the blue flame of an alcohol lamp.

The countess rose, prepared the hot beverage with the care and precaution we have learned from the Russians, then offered a cup to Musadieu, another to Bertin, following this with plates containing sandwiches of *pâte de foies gras* and little English and Austrian cakes.

The count approached the portable table, where was also an assortment of syrups, liqueurs and glasses. He mixed himself a drink, then discreetly disappeared into the next room.

Bertin found himself again facing Musadieu and felt once more a sudden desire to thrust outside this bore, who, now put on his mettle, talked at great length, told stories, repeated jests and made some himself. The painter glanced continually at the clock, the hands of which approached midnight. The countess noticed his glances, understood that he wished to speak to her alone, and, with that ability of a clever woman of the world to change by indescribable shades of tone the whole atmosphere of a drawing-room, to make it understood, without saying anything, whether one is to remain or to go, she diffused about her, by her attitude alone, by the bored expression of her face and eyes, a chill as if she had just opened a window.

Musadieu felt this chilly current freezing his flow

of ideas; and, without asking himself the reason, he felt a sudden desire to rise and depart.

Bertin, as a matter of discretion, followed his example. The two men passed through both drawing-rooms together, followed by the countess, who talked to the painter all the while. She detained him at the threshold of the ante-chamber to make some trifling explanation, while Musadieu, assisted by a footman, put on his topcoat. As Madame de Guilleroy continued to talk to Bertin, the Inspector of Fine Arts, having waited some seconds before the front door, held open by another servant, decided to depart by himself rather than stand there facing the footman any longer.

The door was closed softly behind him, and the countess said to the artist in a perfectly easy tone:

"Why do you go so soon? It is not yet midnight. Stay a little longer."

They reëntered the smaller drawing-room together and seated themselves.

"My God! how that animal set my teeth on edge!" said Bertin.

"Why, pray?"

"He took you away from me a little."

"Oh, not very much."

"Perhaps not, but he irritated me."

"Are you jealous?"

"It is not being jealous to find a man a bore."

He had taken his accustomed armchair, and seated close beside her now he smoothed the folds of her robe with his fingers as he told her of the warm breath of tenderness that had passed through his heart that day.

The countess listened, surprised, charmed, and

gently laid her hand on his white locks, which she caressed tenderly, as to thank him.

"I should like always to live beside you!" he sighed.

He was thinking of her husband, who had retired to rest, asleep no doubt in some neighboring chamber, and he continued:

"It is undoubtedly true that marriage is the only thing that really unites two lives."

"My poor friend!" she murmured, full of pity for him and also for herself.

He had laid his cheek against the countess' knees, and he looked up at her with a tenderness touched with sadness, less ardently than a short time before, when he had been separated from her by her daughter, her husband and Musadieu.

"Heavens! how white your hair has grown!" said the countess with a smile, running her fingers lightly over Olivier's head. "Your last black hairs have disappeared."

"Alas! I know it. Everything goes so soon!"

She was concerned lest she had made him sad.

"Oh, but your hair turned gray very early, you know," she said. "I have always known you with pepper-and-salt locks."

"Yes, that is true."

In order to dispel altogether the slight cloud of regret she had evoked, she leaned over him and, taking his head between her hands, kissed him slowly and tenderly on the forehead with long kisses that seemed as if they never would end. Then they gazed into each other's eyes, seeking therein the reflection of their mutual fondness.

"I should like so much to pass a whole day with

you," Bertin continued. He felt himself tormented obscurely by an inexpressible need of close companionship. He had believed, only a short time ago, that the departure of those who had been present would suffice to realize the desire that had possessed him since morning; and now that he was alone with his mistress, now that he felt on his brow the touch of her hands, and, against his cheek, through the folds of her skirt, the warmth of her body, he felt the same agitation reawakened, the same longing for an unknown and ever-fleeting love. He now fancied that, away from that house—perhaps in the woods where they would be absolutely alone—this deep yearning of his heart would be calmed and satisfied.

"What a boy you are!" said the countess. "Why, we see each other almost every day."

He begged her to devise a plan whereby she might breakfast with him, as she had done four or five times in former days.

The countess was astonished as his caprice, so difficult to gratify now that her daughter had returned. She assured him that she would try to do it, but not before the varnishing-day reception, which would take place the following Saturday.

"And when shall I see you between then and now?" he asked.

"To-morrow evening at the Corbelles'. Come over here Thursday, at three o'clock, if you are free, and I believe that we are to dine together with the duchess on Friday."

"Yes, very well."

He rose.

"Good-by!"

"Good-by, my friend."

He remained standing, unable to decide to go, for he had said almost nothing of all that he had come to say, and his mind was still full of unexpressed thoughts, his heart still swelled with vague desires which he had not uttered.

"Good-by!" he repeated, taking her hands.

"Good-by, my friend!"

"I love you!"

She gave him one of those smiles with which a woman shows a man, in a single instant, all that she has given him.

With a throbbing heart he repeated for the third time "Good-by!" and departed.

CHAPTER IV

A DOUBLE JEALOUSY

One would have said that all the carriages in Paris were making a pilgrimage to the Palais de l'Industrie that day. As early as nine o'clock in the morning they began to drive, by way of all streets, avenues and bridges, toward that hall of the fine arts where all artistic Paris invites all fashionable Paris to be present at the pretended varnishing of three thousand four hundred pictures.

A long procession of visitors crowded through the doors, and, disdaining the exhibition of sculpture, hastened upstairs to the picture gallery. Even while mounting the steps they raised their eyes to the canvases displayed on the walls of the staircase, where are hung the special category of decorative painters

who have sent canvases of unusual proportions or works that the committee dare not refuse.

In the square salon there surged a noisy crowd. The artists, who were in evidence until evening, were easily recognized by their activity, the sonorousness of their voices and the authority of their gestures. They drew their friends by the sleeve toward the pictures, which they pointed out with the exclamations and energetic mimicry of a connoisseur. All types of artists were to be seen—tall men with long hair, wearing soft hats of gray or black, of indescribable shapes, large and round like roofs, with their turned-down brims shadowing the wearer's whole chest. Others were short, active, slight or stocky, wearing foulard cravats and round jackets or the singular costume peculiar to this class of painters.

There was the clique of the fashionables, of the curious and of artists of the boulevard; the clique of Academicians, correct and decorated with red rosettes, enormous or microscopic, according to individual conception of elegance and good form; the clique of *bourgeois* painters, the family taking part and surrounding the father like a triumphal chorus.

On the four great walls the canvases admitted to the honor of the square salon dazzled one on entering with their brilliant tones, glittering frames, the crudity of new paint, brought out by fresh varnish, blinding under the pitiless light poured from above.

The portrait of the President of the Republic faced the entrance, while on another wall a general bedizened with gold lace, sporting a hat decorated with ostrich plumes, and wearing red cloth breeches, hung in pleasant proximity to some naked nymphs

under a willow-tree, and near by was a vessel in distress almost engulfed by a great wave. A bishop of the early Church excommunicating a barbarian king, an Oriental street full of dead victims of the plague and the Shade of Dante in Hell, seized and captivated the eye with irresistible fascination.

Other paintings in the immense room were a charge of cavalry; sharpshooters in a wood; cows in a pasture; two noblemen of the eighteenth century fighting a duel on a street corner; a madwoman sitting on a wall; a priest administering the last rites to a dying man; harvesters, rivers, a sunset, a moonlight effect—in short, samples of everything that artists paint, have painted and will paint until the end of the world.

Olivier, in the midst of a group of celebrated brother painters, members of the Institute and of the jury, was exchanging opinions with them. He was oppressed by a certain uneasiness, a dissatisfaction with his own exhibited work, of the success of which he was very doubtful, in spite of the warm congratulations he had received.

Suddenly he sprang forward. The Duchesse de Mortemain had appeared at the main entrance.

"Hasn't the countess arrived yet?" she inquired of Bertin.

"I have not seen her."

"And Monsieur de Musadieu?"

"I have not seen him either."

"He promised me to be here at ten o'clock, at the top of the stairs, to show me the galleries."

"Will you permit me to take his place, duchess?"

"No, no. Your friends need you. We shall see

each other again very soon, for I shall expect you to lunch with us."

Musadieu hastened toward them. He had been detained for some minutes in the hall of sculpture, and excused himself, breathless already.

"This way, duchess, this way," said he. "Let us begin at the right."

They were just disappearing among the throng when the Comtesse de Guilleroy, leaning on her daughter's arm, entered and looked about her in search of Olivier Bertin.

He saw them and hastened to meet them. As he greeted the two ladies he said:

"How charming you look to-day. Really, Nanette is growing very pretty. She has actually changed in a week."

He was looking at her with his observant eye and added: "The lines of her face are softer, yet more expressive; her complexion is clearer. She is already something less of a little girl and somewhat more of a Parisian."

Suddenly he bethought himself of the grand affair of the day.

"Let us begin at the right," said he, "and we shall soon overtake the duchess."

The countess, well informed on all matters connected with painting, and as interested as if she herself were an exhibitor, inquired: "What do they say of the exposition?"

"A fine one," Bertin replied. "There is a remarkable Bonnat, two excellent things by Carolus Duran, an admirable Puvis de Chavannes, a very new and astonishing Roll, an exquisite Gervex and many

others by Béraud, Cazin, Duez—in short, a heap of good things."

"And you?" said the countess.

"Oh, they compliment me, but I am not satisfied."

"You never are satisfied."

"Yes, sometimes. But to-day I really feel that I am right."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"Let us go and see it."

When they arrived before Bertin's picture—two little peasant girls taking a bath in a brook—they found a group admiring it. The countess was delighted and whispered: "It is simply a delicious bit—a gem! You never have done anything better."

Bertin pressed close to her, loving her and thanking her for every word that calmed his suffering and healed his aching heart. Through his mind ran arguments to convince him that she was right, that she must judge accurately with the observation of an intelligent Parisian. He forgot, so desirous was he to reassure himself that for at least twelve years he had justly reproached her for admiring too much the dainty trifles, the elegant nothings, the sentimentalities and nameless trivialities of the passing fancy of the day, and never art, art alone, art detached from the popular ideas, tendencies and prejudices.

"Let us go on," said he, drawing them away from his picture. He led them for a long time from gallery to gallery, showing them notable canvases and explaining their subjects, happy to be with them.

"What time is it?" the countess asked suddenly.

"Half-past twelve."

"Oh, let us hasten to luncheon, then. The duchess must be waiting for us at Ledoyen's, where she charged me to bring you, in case we should not meet her in the galleries."

The restaurant, in the midst of a little island of trees and shrubs, seemed like an overflowing hive. A confused hum of voices, of calls, the rattling of plates and glasses came from the open windows and large doors. The tables, set close together and filled with people eating, extended in long rows right and left of a narrow passage, up and down which ran the distracted waiters, loaded down with dishes filled with meat, fish or fruit.

Under the circular gallery there was a seething mass of men and women. Every one there laughed, called out, drank and ate, excited by the wines and inundated by one of those waves of joy that sweep over Paris, on certain days, along with the sunshine.

An attendant showed the countess, Annette and Bertin upstairs into a private room, where the duchess awaited them. As they entered the painter observed, beside his aunt, the Marquis de Farandal, attentive and smiling, and extending his hand to receive the parasols and wraps of the countess and her daughter. He felt so annoyed at this that he suddenly desired to say something rude and irritating.

The duchess explained the meeting with her nephew and the departure of Musadieu, who had been carried off by the Minister of the Fine Arts, and Bertin, at the thought that this insipidly good-looking marquis might marry Annette, that he had come here only to see her, and that he regarded her already as destined to share his home, unnerved and

revolted him, as if some one had ignored his own rights—sacred and mysterious rights.

As soon as they were at table, the marquis, who sat beside the young girl, occupied himself in talking to her with the devoted air of a man authorized to pay his addresses.

He had a peculiar expression, which seemed to the painter bold and inquisitive. He smiled in a tender, self-satisfied manner and with a familiar and officious gallantry. In manner and word appeared already something of decision, as if he were about to announce that he had won the prize.

The duchess and the countess seemed to protect and approve this attitude of a pretender and exchanged glances of complicity.

As soon as luncheon was finished the party returned to the exposition. There was such a dense crowd in the galleries, it seemed impossible to make one's way through it. A warm odor of humanity, a stale smell of old gowns and coats made an atmosphere at once heavy and sickening. No one looked at the pictures any longer, but at faces and toilets, looking for prominent personages, and at times came a great jostling of the crowd as it was forced to give way before the high double ladder of the varnishers, who cried: "Make way, messieurs! Make way, mesdames!"

At the end of ten minutes the countess and Olivier found themselves separated from the others. He wished to find them immediately, but, leaning on his arm, the countess said: "Are we not very well off as it is? Let them go, since it was agreed that if we lost sight of each other we should meet again in the buffet at four o'clock."

"That is true," he replied.

But he was absorbed by the idea that the marquis was with Annette and continuing his attempts to please her with his polished impertinence.

"You still love me then?" murmured the countess.

"Yes, certainly," he replied with a preoccupied air, trying to catch a glimpse of the marquis's gray hat over the heads of the crowd.

Feeling that he was preoccupied and wishing to lead him back to her own train of thought, the countess continued:

"If you only knew how I adore your picture this year! It is certainly your *chef-d'œuvre.*"

He smiled suddenly, forgetting the young people in remembering his anxiety of the morning.

"Do you really think so?" he asked.

"Yes, I prefer it to all the rest."

With artful wheedling, she crowned him anew, having been aware for some time that nothing has a stronger effect on an artist than tender and persistent flattery. Captivated, cheered, encouraged by her sweet words, he began to chat again, seeing and hearing only her in that surging throng.

By way of expressing his thanks, he murmured in her ear: "I have a mad desire to embrace you!"

A warm wave of emotion swept over her, and, raising her sparkling eyes to his, she repeated her question: "Then you still love me?"

He replied with the intonation she wished to hear and which she had not heard before:

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

"Come to see me often in the evenings," she said. "Now that I have my daughter I shall not go out very much."

Since she had recognized in him this unexpected reawakening of tenderness, her heart was stirred with great happiness. With Olivier's silvery hair and the calming touch of time she had less dread of his being fascinated by another woman, but she was terribly afraid that he might marry from a sheer horror of loneliness. This fear, which was of long standing, increased constantly and set her wits to work to contriving plans whereby she might have him near her as much as possible and prevent his spending long evenings alone in the chill silence of his empty rooms. Not being always able to attract and hold him, she would suggest amusements for him, sent him to the theatre, forced him to go into society, being better pleased to know that he was surrounded by other women than alone in his gloomy house.

She resumed, answering his secret thought: "Ah, if I could only have you always with me, how I should spoil you! Promise me to come often, since I hardly go out at all now."

"I promise it."

At that moment a voice murmured "Mamma!" in her ear.

The countess started and turned. Annette, the duchess and the marquis had just rejoined them.

"It is four o'clock," said the duchess. "I am very tired and I wish to go now."

"I will go, too; I have had enough of it," said the countess.

They reached the interior stairway which divides the galleries where the drawings and water-colors are hung, overlooking the immense garden enclosed in glass, where the sculptures are exhibited.

From the platform of this stairway they could see

from one end to the other of this great conservatory, filled with statues set up along the pathway around large green shrubs, and below them the crowd which covered the paths like a moving black wave. The marbles rose from this mass of dark hats and shoulders, piercing it in a thousand places and seeming almost luminous in their dazzling whiteness.

As Bertin took leave of the ladies at the door of exit Madame de Guilleroy whispered:

"Then—will you come this evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

Bertin reëntered the exposition to talk with the artists over the impressions of the day.

Painters and scoulptors stood talking in groups around the statues and in front of the buffet, upholding or attacking the same ideas that were discussed every year, using the same arguments over almost exactly similar works. Olivier, who usually took a lively share in these disputes, being quick at repartee and clever in disconcerting attacks, besides having a reputation as an ingenious theorist of which he was proud, tried to urge himself to take an active part in the debates, but the things he said interested him no more than those he heard, and he longed to go away, to listen no more, to understand no more, knowing beforehand as he did all that any one could say on these ancient questions of art, of which he knew all sides.

He loved these things, however, and had loved them until now in an almost exclusive way; but today he was distracted by one of those slight but persistent preoccupations, one of those petty anxieties which are so small we ought not to allow ourselves to be troubled by them, but which, in spite of

all we do or say, prick through our thoughts like an invisible thorn buried in the flesh.

He had even forgotten his anxiety over his little peasant bathers in the remembrance of the offensive behavior of the marquis toward Annette. What did it matter to him, after all? Had he any right? Why should he wish to prevent this precious marriage, arranged beforehand and suitable from every point of view? But no reasoning could efface that impression of uneasiness and discontent which had seized him when he beheld Farandal talking and smiling like an accepted suitor, caressing with his glances the fair face of the young girl.

When he entered the countess' drawing-room that evening and found her alone with her daughter, continuing by the lamplight their knitting for the poor, he had great difficulty in preventing himself from saying sneering things about the marquis and opening Annette's eyes to the man's real vulgarity, veiled by a mask of elegance and good form.

For some time past, during these after-dinner evening visits, he had often allowed himself to lapse into occasional sleepy silence and to fall into the easy attitudes of an old friend who does not stand on ceremony. But now he seemed suddenly to rouse himself and to show the alertness of a man who does his best to be agreeable, who is interested in what he is going to say and who, before certain persons, seek for the most brilliant and choice manner best phrases in which to express their ideas and render them attractive. No longer did he allow the conversation to lag, but did his best to keep it bright and interesting, and when he had made the countess and her daughter laugh gaily, when he felt that he

had touched their emotions or when they ceased to work in order to listen to him he felt a thrill of pleasure, an assurance of success, which rewarded him for his efforts.

He came now whenever he knew they were alone, and never, perhaps, had he passed such delightful evenings.

Madame de Guilleroy, whose continual fears were soothed by this assiduity, made fresh efforts to attract him and to keep him near her. She refused invitations to dinners in the city, she did not go to balls, nor to the theatre, in order to have the joy of throwing into the telegraph-box, on going out at three o'clock, a little blue telegram which said: "We shall see you soon." At first, wishing to give him earlier the *tête-à-tête* that he desired, she had sent her daughter to bed at ten o'clock. Then when he had on one occasion appeared surprised at this and had begged laughingly that Annette should not be treated any longer like a naughty little girl, she had allowed her daughter a quarter of an hour's grace, then half an hour, and finally a whole hour. Bertin never remained long after the young girl had retired; it was as if half the charm that held him there had departed with her. He would then take the little low seat that he preferred, and sitting down beside the countess would lay his cheek against her knee with a caressing movement. She would give him one of her hands, which he held in his own, and the fever of his spirit would suddenly be abated; he ceased to talk, and appeared to find repose in tender silence.

Little by little the countess, with her keen feminine instinct, saw that Annette attracted him almost as

much as she herself. This did not anger her; she was glad that in their midst he could find something of that domestic happiness which he lacked; and she imprisoned him between them, as it were, playing the part of tender mother in such a way that he might almost believe himself the young girl's father; and a new bond of tenderness was added to all that already held him to this household.

Her personal vanity, always alert, but disturbed since she had felt in several ways, like almost invisible pin-pricks, the innumerable attacks of advancing age, took on a new allurement. In order to become as slender as Annette, she continued to drink nothing, and the real slimness of her figure gave her the appearance of a young girl. When her back was turned one could hardly distinguish her from Annette; but her face showed the effect of this régime. The plump flesh began to be wrinkled and took on a yellowish tint which rendered more dazzling by contrast the superb freshness of the young girl's complexion. Then the countess began to make up her face with the methods of an actress, and, though in broad daylight she produced an effect that was slightly artificial, in the evening her complexion had that charmingly soft tint obtained by women who know how to make up well.

The realization of her fading beauty, and the employment of artificial aid to restore it, somewhat changed her habits. She avoided comparison with her daughter in the full light of day as much as possible, but rather sought it by lamplight, which, if anything, showed her off to greater advantage. When she was fatigued, pale, and felt that she looked older than usual, she had convenient head-

aches which obliged her to excuse herself from going to balls and theatres; but on days when she knew she looked well she triumphed again and played the elder sister with the grave modesty of a little mother. In order always to wear gowns like those of her daughter, she made Annette wear toilettes suitable for a fully-grown young woman, a trifle too old for her; and Annette, who showed more and more plainly her joyous and laughing disposition, wore them with a sparkling vivacity that rendered her still more attractive. She lent herself with all her heart to the coquettish arts of her mother, acting with her, as if by instinct graceful little domestic scenes; she knew when to embrace her at the effective moment, how to clasp her tenderly round the waist, and to show by a movement, a caress, or some ingenious pose, how pretty both were and how much they resembled each other.

From seeing the two so much together, and from continually comparing them, Olivier Bertin sometimes actually confused them in his own mind. Sometimes, when Annette spoke, and he happened to be looking elsewhere, he was compelled to ask: "Which of you said that?" He often amused himself by playing this game of confusion when all three were alone in the drawing-room with the Louis XV tapestries. He would close his eyes and beg them to ask him the same question, the one after the other, and then change the order of the interrogations, so that he might recognize their voices. They did this with so much cleverness in imitating each other's intonations, in saying the same phrases with the same accents, that often he could not tell which spoke. In fact, they had come to speak so

much alike that the servants answered "Yes, madame" to the daughter and "Yes, mademoiselle" to the mother.

From imitating each other's voices and movements for amusement, they acquired such a similarity of gait and gesture that Monsieur de Guilleroy himself, when he saw one or the other pass through the shadowy end of the drawing-room, confounded them for an instant and asked: "Is that you, Annette, or is it your mamma?"

From this resemblance, natural and assumed, was engendered in the mind and heart of the painter a strange impression of a double entity, old and young, wise yet ignorant, two bodies made, the one after the other, with the same flesh; in fact, the same woman continued, but rejuvenated, having become once more what she was formerly. Thus he lived near them, shared between them, uneasy, troubled, feeling his old ardor for the mother awakened together with an indefinable affection for the daughter.

STRONG AS DEATH

PART II

CHAPTER I

A WILLING ENVOY

MY FRIEND: My mother has just died at Roncières. We shall leave here at midnight. Do not come; for we have told no one. But pity me and think of me. Your ANY.

July 21, 12 M.

MY POOR FRIEND: I should have gone, notwithstanding what you wrote, if I had not become used to regarding all your wishes as commands. I have thought of you with poignant grief ever since last night. I think of that silent journey you made, sitting opposite your daughter and your husband, in that dimly-lighted carriage, which bore you toward your dead. I could see all three of you under the oil lamp, you weeping and Annette sobbing. I saw your arrival at the station, the horrible drive to the castle which you entered in the midst of a group of servants, saw your rush up the stairs toward that room, toward that bed where she lies, your first look at her, and your kiss on her thin, motionless face. And I thought of your heart, your poor heart—that poor heart, part of which belongs to me and which is breaking, which suffers so much, which stifles you, making me suffer also at this moment.

With profound pity, I kiss your eyes filled with tears.

OLIVIER.

Roncières, July 24.

Your letter would have done me good, my friend, if anything could do me good in the terribie grief that has come upon me. We buried her yesterday, and since her poor lifeless body has gone out of this house it seems to me that I am alone in the world. We love our mothers almost without knowing or feeling it, for such love is as natural as it is to live, and we do not realize how deep-rooted is that love until the moment of final separation. No other affection is comparable to that, for all others come by chance, while this begins at birth; all the others are brought to us later by the accidents of life, while this has lived in our very blood since our first day on earth. And then, it is not only a mother we lose, but our childhood itself, which half disappears, for our life of young girlhood belonged to her as much as to ourselves. She alone knew it as we knew it; she knew about innumerable things, remote, insignificant and dear, which are and which were the first sweet emotions of our heart. To her alone I could still say: "Do you remember, mother, the day when——? Do you remember, mother, the china doll that grandmother gave me?" Both of us murmured to each other a long, sweet chaplet of

trifling childish memories, which no one on earth now knows of but myself. So it is a part of myself that is dead—the older, the better portion. I have lost the poor heart wherein the little girl I was once still lived. Now no one knows her any more; no one remembers the little Anne, her short skirts, her laughter and her little ways.

And a day will come—and perhaps it is not far away—when in my turn I too shall go, leaving my dear Annette alone in the world, as mamma has left me to-day. How sad all this is, how hard, and cruel! Yet one never thinks about it; we do not see death all around taking some one every instant, as it will soon take us. If we should look at it, if we should think of it, if we were not thoughtless, giddy, and blinded by all that passes before us, we could no longer live, for the sight of this endless massacre would drive us mad.

I am so crushed, so despairing, that I have no longer strength to do anything. Day and night I think of my poor mamma, nailed in that box, buried beneath that earth, in that field, under the rain, of that dear old face, which I used to kiss with so much happiness, and which is now only a mass of frightful decay! Oh, what horror!

When I lost papa, I was just married, and I did not feel all these things as I do to-day. Yes, pity me, think of me, write to me. I need you so much just now.

ANNE.

Paris, July 25.

MY POOR FRIEND: Your grief gives me horrible pain, and life no longer seems rosy to me. Since your departure I am lost, abandoned, without ties or refuge. Everything fatigues me, bores and irritates me. I am ceaselessly thinking of you and Annette; I feel that you are both far, far away when I need you near me so much.

It is extraordinary how far away from me you seem to be, and how I miss you. Never, even in my younger days, have you been my all, as you are at this moment. I have for some time foreseen this shock, which must be a sun-stroke in Indian summer. What I feel is so very strange that I wish to tell you about it. Only imagine, since your absence I cannot take walks any more! Formerly, and even during the last few months, I enjoyed starting out alone and strolling along the street, amusing myself by looking at people and things, pleased at the mere sight of everything and the exercise of walking. I would go along not knowing whither, just for the sake of walking, breathing, dreaming. Now, I can no longer do this. As soon as I reach the street a feeling of distress comes over me, like the fear of a blind man that has lost his dog. I become uneasy, exactly like a traveler that has lost his way in the wood, and I am compelled to return home. Paris seems empty, frightful, alarming. I ask myself: "Where am I going?" I answer myself: "Nowhere, since I am still walking." Well, I simply cannot walk without some object. The bare thought of walking straight before me wearies and bores me inexpressibly. Then I take my melancholy to the club.

And do you know why? For the sole reason that you are no longer here. I am certain of this. When I know that you

are in Paris, my walks are no longer useless, for it is possible that I may meet you in the first street I turn into. I can go anywhere because you may be anywhere. If I do not see you, I may at least find Annette, who is an emanation of yourself. You and she fill the streets full of hope for me—the hope of recognizing you, whether you approach me from a distance, or whether I divine your identity in following you. And then the city becomes charming to me, and the women whose figures resemble yours stir my heart with all the life of the streets, hold my attention, occupy my eyes, and give me a sort of hunger to see you.

You will consider me very selfish, my poor friend, to speak to you in this way of the solitude of an old cooing pigeon when you are shedding such bitter tears. Pardon me! I am so used to being spoiled by you that I cry "Help! help!" when I have you no longer.

I kiss your feet so that you may have pity on me.

OLIVIER.

Roncières, July 30.

MY FRIEND: Thanks for your letter. I need so much to know that you love me! I have just passed some frightful days. Indeed, I really thought that grief would kill me in my turn.

It was like a block of suffering in my breast, growing larger and larger, stifling me, strangling me. The physician that was called to treat me for the nervous attacks, which recurred four or five time a day, injected morphine, which made me almost wild, and the hot weather we have had aggravated my condition and threw me into a state of over-excitement that was almost delirium. I am a little more calm since the great storm of Friday. I must tell you that after the day of the funeral I could weep no more, but during the storm, the approach of which upset me, I suddenly felt the tears beginning to flow from my eyes, slow, small, burning. Oh, those first tears, how they hurt me! They seemed to tear me, as if they had claws, and my throat was so choked that I could hardly breathe. Then the tears came faster, larger, cooler. They ran from my eyes as from a spring, and came so fast that my handkerchief was saturated and I had to take another. The great block of grief seemed to soften and to flow away through my eyes.

From that moment I have been weeping from morning till night, and that is saving me. One would really end by going mad or dying, if one could not cry. I am very lonely, too. My husband is making some little trips through the country, and I insisted that he should take Annette with him, to distract and console her a little. They go in the carriage or on horseback as far as eight or ten leagues from Roncières, and she returns to me rosy with youth, in spite of her sadness, her eyes shining with life, animated by the country air and the excursion she has had. How beautiful it is to be at that age! I think we shall remain here a fortnight or three weeks longer; then, although it will be August, we shall return to Paris for the reason you know.

I send to you all that remains to me of my heart.

ANY.

STRONG AS DEATH

Paris, August 4th.

I can bear this no longer, my dear friend; you must come back, for something is certainly going to happen to me. I ask myself whether I am not ill, I have such a distaste for everything I used to take pleasure in doing, or did with indifferent resignation. For one thing, it is so warm in Paris that every night means a Turkish bath of eight or nine hours. I get up overcome by the fatigue of this sleep in a hot bath, and for an hour or two I walk about before a clean canvas, with the intention of drawing something. But mind, eye, and hand are all empty! I am no longer a painter! This futile effort to work is exasperating. I summon my models; I place them, and as I have painted all their poses, gestures, and expressions to satiety, I make them dress again and let them go. Frankly, I can no longer see anything new, and I suffer from this as if I were blind. What is it? Is it fatigue of the eye or of the brain, exhaustion of the artistic faculty or of the optic nerve? Who knows? It seems to me that I have ceased to discover anything in the unexplored corner that I have been permitted to visit. I no longer perceive anything but that which all the world knows; I do the things that all poor painters have done; I have only one subject now, and only the observation of a vulgar pedant. Once upon a time, and not so very long ago, either, the number of new subjects seemed to me unlimited, and I had such a variety of ways of depicting them that it was difficult for me to make a choice. But now, alas! Suddenly the world of half-seen subjects has become depopulated, my pursuit is fruitless and unfruitful. The people that pass do not mean anything to me. I no longer find in every human being the character and savor which once I loved to discern and portray. I believe, however, that I could make a very pretty portrait of your daughter. It is because she resembles you so much that I confound you both in my mind? Yes, perhaps.

Well, then, after forcing myself to sketch a man or a woman who does not resemble any of the familiar models, I decide to go and breakfast somewhere, for I no longer have the courage to sit down alone in my own dining-room. The Boulevard Malesherbes seems like a forest path imprisoned in a dead city. All the houses smell empty. On the street the sprinklers throw showers of white rain, splashing the wooden pavement whence rises the vapor of damp tar and stable refuse; and from one end to the other of the long descent from the Parc Monceau to Saint Augustin, one sees five or six black forms, unimportant passers, tradesmen or domestics. The shadow of the plane-trees at their base and on the burning sidewalks makes a curious spot, looking almost like liquid, as if water spilled there were drying. The stillness of the leaves on the branches, and of their gray silhouettes on the asphalt, expresses the fatigue of the roasting city, slumbering and perspiring like a workman asleep on a bench in the sun. Yes, she perspires, the beggar, and she smells frightfully through her sewer openings, through the vent-holes of sinks and kitchens, the streams through which the filth of her streets is running. Then I think of those summer mornings in your orchard full of little wild-flowers that scent the air with a suggestion of honey. Then discouraged already, I enter the

restaurant where bald, fat, tired-looking men are eating, with half-opened waistcoats and moist, shining foreheads. The food shows the effect of heat—the melon growing soft under the ice, the soft bread, the flabby filet, the warmed-over vegetables, the rancid cheese, the fruits ripened on the premises. I go out, nauseated, and go home to try to sleep a little until the hour for dinner, which I take at the club.

There I always find Adelmans, Maldant, Rocdiane, Landa, and many others, who bore and weary me as much as hand-organs. Each one has his own little tune, or tunes, which I have heard for fifteen years, and they play them all together every evening in that club, which is apparently a place where one goes to be entertained. Some one should change my generation for me, for my eyes, my ears, and my mind have had enough of it. They still make conquests, however, they boast of them and congratulate one another on them!

After yawning as many times as there are minutes between eight o'clock and midnight, I go home and go to bed, and while I undress I think that the same thing will begin over again the next day.

Yes, my dear friend, I am at the age when a bachelor's life becomes intolerable, because there is nothing new for me under the sun. An unmarried man should be young, curious, eager. When one is no longer all that, it becomes dangerous to remain free. Heavens! how I loved my liberty, long ago, before I loved you more! How burdensome it is to me to-day! For an old bachelor like me, liberty is an empty thing, empty everywhere; it is the path to death, with nothing in it to prevent one from seeing the end; it is the ceaseless query: "What shall I do? Whom can I go to see, so that I shall not be alone?" And I go from one friend to another, from one handshake to the next, begging for a little friendship. I gather up crumbs, but they do not make a loaf. You, I have you, my friend, but you do not belong to me. Perhaps it is because of you that I suffer this distress, for it is the longing for your presence, for the same roof over our heads, for the same walls inclosing our lives, the same interests binding our hearts together, the need of that community of hopes, griefs, pleasures, joys, sadness, and also of material things, that fills me with so much yearning. I long to breathe forever the same air that you breathe, to share everything with you, to possess nothing that does not belong to both of us, to feel that all which makes up my own life belongs to you as much as to me—the glass from which I drink, the chair on which I sit, the bread I eat and the fire that warms me.

Adieu! Return soon. I suffer too much when you are far away.

OLIVIER.

Roncières, August 8th.

My friend, I am ill, and so fatigued that you would not recognize me at all. I believe that I have wept too much. I must rest a little before I return, for I do not wish you to see me as I am. My husband sets out for Paris the day after to-morrow, and will give you news of us. He expects to take you to dinner somewhere, and charges me to ask you to wait for him at your house about seven o'clock.

As for me, as soon as I feel a little better, as soon as I have no more this corpse-like face which frightens me, I will return to be near you. In all the world, I have only Annette and you, and I wish to offer to each of you all that I can give without robbing the other. ANY.

When he received this letter announcing the still delayed return, Olivier was seized with an immoderate desire to take a carriage to the railway station to catch a train for Roncières; then, thinking that M. de Guilleroy must return the next day, he resigned himself, and even began to wish for the arrival of the husband with almost as much impatience as if it were that of the wife herself.

Never had he liked Guilleroy as well as during those twenty-four hours of waiting. When he saw him approach, he rushed toward him, with hands extended, exclaiming:

"Ah, dear friend! how happy I am to see you!"

The other also seemed very glad, delighted above all things to return to Paris, for life had not been gay in Normandy during the three weeks he had passed there.

The two men sat down on a little two-seated sofa in a corner of the studio, under a canopy of Oriental stuffs, and again shook hands with mutual sympathy.

"And the countess?" asked Bertin, "how is she?"

"Not very well. She has been very much affected, and is recovering too slowly. I must confess that I am a little anxious about her."

"But why does she not return?"

"I know nothing about it. It was impossible for me to induce her to return here."

"What does she do all day?"

"Oh, heavens! She weeps, and thinks of her

mother. That is not good for her. I should like her very much to decide on taking a change of air, and leaving the place where that happened, you understand?"

"And Annette?"

"Oh, she is a flower in bloom."

Olivier smiled with joy.

"Was she very much grieved?" he asked again.

"Yes, very much, very much, but you know that grief at eighteen years does not last long."

After a silence Guilleroy resumed:

"Where shall we dine, my dear fellow? I need to be cheered up, to hear some noise and see some action."

"Well, at this season, it seems to me that the Café des Ambassadeurs is the right place."

So they set out, arm in arm, toward the Champs-Elysées. Guilleroy, excited by the feeling that stirs all Parisians when they return, and to whom the city, after every absence, seems rejuvenated and full of possible surprises, asked the painter a thousand questions about what people had been doing and saying; and Olivier, after indifferent replies which betrayed all the boredom of his solitude, spoke of Roncières, tried to find in this man, to gather round him that almost tangible something left with us by persons with whom we have recently been associated, that subtle emanation of another that one carries away when leaving them, which remains with us a few hours and evaporates amid new surroundings.

The heavy sky of a summer evening hung over the city and over the great avenue where, under the trees, the gay refrains of open-air concerts were

beginning to sound. The two men, seated on the balcony of the Café des Ambassadeurs, looked down upon the still empty benches and chairs of the inclosure up to the little stage, where the singers, in the mingled light of electric globes and fading day, displayed their striking costumes and their rosy complexions. Odors of frying, of sauces, of hot food, floated in the slight breezes from the chestnut-trees, and when a woman passed, seeking her reserved chair, followed by a man in a black coat, she diffused on her way the fresh perfume of her dress and her person.

Guilleroy, who was radiant, murmured:

"Oh, I would rather be here than in the country!"

"And I," Bertin replied, "should prefer to be there rather than here."

"Nonsense!"

"Heavens, yes! I find Paris tainted this summer."

"Oh, well, my dear fellow, but it is always Paris!"

The deputy seemed to be enjoying his day, one of those rare days of effervescence and gaiety in which grave men do foolish things. He looked at two *cocottes* dining at a neighboring table with three thin young men, superlatively correct, and he slyly questioned Olivier about all the well-known girls, whose names were heard every day. Then he murmured in a tone of deep regret:

"You are lucky to have remained a bachelor. You can do and see many things."

But the painter did not agree with him, and, as a man will do when haunted by a persistent idea, he took Guilleroy into his confidence on the subject of his sadness and isolation. When he had said every-

thing, had recited to the end his litany of melancholy, and, urged by the longing to relieve his heart, had confessed naïvely how much he had longed for the love and companionship of a woman installed in his home, the count, in his turn, admitted that marriage had its advantages. Recovering his parliamentary eloquence in order to sing the praises of his domestic happiness, he eulogized the countess in the highest terms, to which Olivier listened gravely with frequent nods of approval.

Happy to hear her spoken of, but jealous of that intimate happiness which Guilleroy praised as a matter of duty, the painter finally murmured, with sincere conviction:

"Yes, indeed, you were lucky!"

The deputy, flattered, assented to this; then he resumed:

"I should like very much to see her return; indeed, I am a little anxious about her just now. Why, since you are bored in Paris, you might go to Roncières and bring her back. She will listen to you, for you are her best friend; while a husband—you know——"

Delighted, Olivier replied: "I ask nothing better. But do you think it would not annoy her to see me arriving in that abrupt way?"

"No, not at all. Go, by all means, my dear fellow."

"Well, then, I will. I will leave to-morrow by the one o'clock train. Shall I send her a telegram?"

"No, I will attend to that. I will telegraph, so that you will find a carriage at the station."

As they had finished dinner, they strolled again

up the Boulevard, but in half an hour the count suddenly left the painter, under the pretext of an urgent affair that he had quite forgotten.

CHAPTER II

SPRINGTIME AND AUTUMN

The countess and her daughter, dressed in black crape, had just seated themselves opposite each other at breakfast in the large dining-room at Roncières. The portraits of many ancestors, crudely painted, one in a cuirass, another in a tight-fitting coat, the former a powdered officer of the French Guards, the latter a colonel of the Restoration, hung in line on the walls, a collection of deceased Guilleroys, in old frames from which the gilding was peeling. Two servants, stepping softly, began to serve the two silent women, and the flies made a little cloud of black specks, dancing and buzzing around the crystal chandelier that hung over the centre of the table.

"Open the windows," said the countess, "it is a little cool here."

The three long windows, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and large as bay-windows, were opened wide. A breath of soft air, bearing the odor of warm grass and the distant sounds of the country, swept in suddenly through these openings, mingling with the slightly damp air of the room, inclosed by the thick walls of the castle.

"Ah, that is good!" said Annette, taking a full breath.

The eyes of the two women had turned toward the outside and now gazed out beneath the blue sky, lightly veiled by the midday haze at the long verdant lawns of the park, with its groups of trees here and there, and its perspective opening on a yellow expanse of country, illuminated as far as the eye could see by the golden gleam of ripe grain.

"We will take a long walk after breakfast," said the countess. "We might walk as far as Berville, along the river, for it would be too warm on the plain."

"Yes, mamma, and let us take Julio to scare up some partridges."

"You know that your father forbids it."

"Oh, but since papa is in Paris!—it is so amusing to see Julio setting. There he is now, worrying the cows! Oh, how funny he is!"

Pushing back her chair, she jumped up and ran to the window, calling out: "Get them, Julio! Get them!"

Upon the lawn three heavy cows, gorged with grass and overcome with heat, lay on their sides, their bellies rounded from the pressure of the earth. Rushing from one to another, barking and bounding wildly, in a sort of mad abandon, partly real, partly feigned, a shooting dog, a slender, white and red spaniel, whose curly ears flapped at every bound, was trying to rouse the three big beasts, which did not wish to get up. It was evidently the dog's favorite sport, with which he amused himself whenever he saw the cows lying down. Irritated, but not frightened, they gazed at him with their large, moist eyes, turning their heads to watch him.

Annette, from her window, cried:

"Fetch, them, Julio, fetch them!"

The excited spaniel, growing bolder, barked louder and ventured close behind them, snapping as though about to bite them. They began to grow uneasy, and the nervous twitching of their skin, to get rid of the flies, became more frequent and protracted.

Suddenly the dog, carried along by the impetus of a rush that he could not check in time, bounded so close to one cow that, in order not to fall against her, he was obliged to jump over her. Startled by the bound, the heavy animal took fright, and first raising her head she finally raised herself slowly on her four legs, sniffing loudly. Seeing her erect, the other two immediately got up also, and Julio began to prance around them in a dance of triumph, while Annette praised him.

"Bravo, Julio, bravo!"

"Come," said the countess, "come to breakfast, my child."

But the young girl, shading her eyes with one hand, announced:

"There comes a telegraph messenger!"

Along the invisible path among the wheat and the oats a blue blouse appeared to be gliding along the top of the grain, and it came toward the castle with the firm step of a man.

"Oh, heavens!" murmured the countess; "I hope he does not bring bad news!"

She was still shaken with that terror which remains with us a long time after the death of some loved one has been announced by a telegram. Now she could not remove the gummed band to open the little blue paper without feeling her fingers tremble

and her soul agitated, believing that from those folds which it took so long to open would come a grief that would cause her tears to flow afresh.

Annette, on the contray, full of girlish curiosity, was delighted to meet with the unknown mystery that comes to all of us at times. Her heart, which life had just saddened for the first time, could anticipate only something joyful from that black and ominous bag hanging from the side of the mail-carrier, who saw so many emotions through the city streets and the country lanes.

The countess ceased to eat, concentrating her thoughts on the man who was approaching, bearer of a few written words that might wound her as if a knife had been thrust in her throat. The anguish of having known that experience made her breathless, and she tried to guess what this hurried message might be. About what? From whom? The thought of Olivier flashed through her mind. Was he ill? Dead, perhaps, too!

The ten minutes she had to wait seemed interminable to her; then, when she had torn open the despatch and recognized the name of her husband, she read: "I telegraph to tell you that our friend Bertin leaves for Roncières on the one o'clock train. Send phaeton station. Love."

"Well, mamma?" said Annette.

"Monsieur Olivier Bertin is coming to see us."

"Ah, how lucky! When?"

"Very soon."

"At four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how kind he is!"

But the countess had turned pale, for a new anx-

iety had lately troubled her, and the sudden arrival of the painter seemed to her as painful a menace as anything she might have been able to foresee.

"You will go to meet him with the carriage," said she to her daughter.

"And will you not come, too, mamma?"

"No, I will wait for you here."

"Why? That will hurt him."

"I do not feel very well."

"You wished to walk as far as Berville just now."

"Yes, but my breakfast has made me feel ill."

"You will feel better between now and the time to go."

"No, I am going up to my room. Let me know as soon as you get back."

"Yes, mamma."

After giving orders that the phaeton should be ready at the proper hour, and that a room be prepared, the countess returned to her own room, and shut herself in.

A desire to flee seized her, so much did she fear his first look. She would have preferred to wait another week or two. In a week, with care, one may change the face completely, since women, even when young and in good health, under the slightest influence may become unrecognizable from one day to another. But the idea of appearing in broad daylight before Olivier, in the open country, in the heat of August, beside Annette, so fresh and blooming, disturbed her so much that she decided immediately not to go to the station, but to await him in the half-darkened drawing-room.

She went up to her room and fell into a dream.

Breaths of warm air stirred the curtains from time to time; the song of the crickets filled the air. Never before had she felt so sad. It was no longer the great grief that had shattered her heart, overwhelming her before the soulless body of her beloved old mother. That grief, which she had believed incurable, had in a few days become softened and was now but a sorrow of remembrance, but now she felt herself swept away on a deep wave of melancholy into which she had entered gradually and from which she never would emerge.

She felt an almost irresistible desire to weep—and would not. Every time she felt her eyelids grow moist she wiped them quickly, rose, paced about the room, looked out into the park and gazed at the tall trees, watched the slow, black flight of the crows against the background of blue sky. Then she passed before her mirror, judged of her appearance with one glance, effaced the trace of a tear in the corner of her eye with the powder puff and looked at the clock, trying to guess whereabouts on the road he was.

Like all women who are carried away by a distress of soul, whether real or unreasonable, she clung to him with frantic affection. Was he not her all—all, everything, more than life, all that any one must be who has come to be the sole affection of one who feels the approach of age?

Suddenly she heard in the distance the crack of a whip. She ran to the window and saw the phaeton as it turned round the lawn, drawn by two horses. Seated beside Annette, in the back seat of the carriage, Olivier waved his handkerchief on seeing the countess, and she responded by waving him a greet-

ing from the window. Then she went downstairs with a heart throbbing fast but happy now, thrilled with joy at knowing him so near, of speaking to him and seeing him.

They met in the antechamber, before the drawing-room door.

He held out his arms to her with an irresistible impulse and in a voice warmed by real emotion exclaimed: "Ah, my poor countess, let me embrace you!"

She closed her eyes, leaned toward him, holding her cheek to him, and as he pressed his lips upon it, she murmured in his ear:

"I love you!"

Then Olivier, without dropping the hands he clasped in his own, looked at her, saying: "Let us see that sad face."

She felt ready to faint.

"Yes, a little pale," said he, "but that is nothing."

To thank him for saying that, she said brokenly:

"Ah, dear friend, dear friend!" finding nothing else to say.

But he turned, looking behind her in search of Annette, who had disappeared.

"Is it not strange," he said abruptly, "to see your daughter in mourning?"

"Why?" inquired the countess.

"What? You ask why?" he exclaimed, with extraordinary animation. "Why, it is your own portrait painted by me—it is my portrait. It is yourself, such as you were when I met you long ago when I entered the duchess' house! Ah, do you remember that door where you passed under my gaze, as a frigate passes under the cannon of a fort? Good

heavens! when I saw the little one just now at the railway station, standing on the platform, all in black, with the sun shining on her hair massed around her face, the blood rushed to my head. I thought I should weep. I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad, when one has known you as I have, who has studied you as no one else has and reproduced you in painting, madame. Ah, I thought that you had sent her alone to meet me at the station in order to give me that surprise. My God! but I was surprised, indeed! I tell you, it is enough to drive one mad."

He called: "Annette! Nané!"

The young girl's voice replied from outside, where she was giving sugar to the horses:

"Yes, yes, I am here!"

"Come here!"

She came running.

"Here, stand close beside your mother."

She obeyed, and he compared the two, but repeated mechanically as though unconvinced: "Yes, it is astonishing, astonishing!" for they resembled each other less when side by side than they did before leaving Paris, the young girl having acquired a new expression of luminous youth in her black attire, while the mother had long since lost that radiance of hair and complexion that had dazzled and entranced the painter when they met for the first time.

Then the countess and Olivier entered the drawing-room. He seemed in high spirits.

"Ah, what a good plan it was to come here!" he said. "But it was your husband's idea that I should come, you know. He charged me to take you back

with me. And I—do you know what I propose? You have no idea, have you? Well, I propose, on the contrary, to remain here! Paris is odious in this heat, while the country is delicious. Heavens! how good it is here!"

The dews of evening impregnated the park with freshness, the soft breeze made the trees tremble, and the earth exhaled imperceptible vapors which threw a light, transparent veil over the horizon. The three cows, standing with drooping heads, cropped the grass with avidity, and four peacocks, with a loud rustling of wings, flew up into their accustomed perch in a cedar tree, under the windows of the château. Some dogs were barking far across the country, and in the quiet air of the close of day human voices were heard in detached sentences across the fields from one meadow to another, and those short, guttural cries used in driving animals.

The painter, with bare head, his eyes sparkling, breathed deeply, and, as he met the countess' look, he said:

"This is happiness!"

"It never lasts," she answered, approaching nearer.

"Let us take it when it comes," said he.

"You never used to like the country until now," the countess replied, smiling.

"I like it to-day because I find you here. I could no longer exist in a place where you are not. When one is young, he may be in love at a distance, through letters, thoughts or dreams, perhaps because he feels that life is all before him, perhaps, too, because passion is stronger than pure affection. At my age, on the contrary, love has become like the habit of an invalid; it is a binding up of the soul,

which flies now with only one wing, and mounts less frequently into the ideal. The heart knows no more ecstasy, only selfish wants. And then I am well aware that I have no time to lose to enjoy what remains for me."

"Oh, old man!" she remonstrated, taking his hand.

"Yes, yes, I am old," he repeated. "Everything shows it, my hair, my changing character, the sadness which is stealing on me. Alas! that is something I never have known till now—sadness. If some one had told me when I was thirty that a time would come when I should be sad without cause, uneasy, discontented with everything, I should not have believed it. That proves that my heart also has grown old."

The countess replied with an air of profound certainty:

"Oh, as for me, my heart is still young. It never has changed. Yes, it has grown younger, perhaps. Once it was twenty; now it is only sixteen!"

They remained a long while thus, talking in the open window, blending with the spirit of the evening, very near each other, nearer than they ever had been, in this hour of tenderness, this twilight of love as of the day.

A servant entered, announcing dinner.

"Have you called my daughter?" the countess asked.

"Mademoiselle is in the dining-room."

All three sat down at the table. The shutters were closed, and two large candelabra, with six candles each, illumined Annette's face and seemed to powder her hair with gold dust. Bertin, smiling, looked at her continually.

"Heavens, how pretty she is in black!" he said.

And he turned toward the countess while admiring the daughter, as if to thank the mother for having given him this pleasure.

When they returned to the drawing-room the moon had risen above the trees in the park. Their sombre mass appeared like a great island, and the country round about like a sea hidden under the light mist that float over the plains.

"Oh, mamma, let us take a walk," said Annette.

The countess consented.

"I will take Julio."

"Very well, if you wish."

They set out. The young girl walked in front, playing with the dog. When they crossed the lawn they heard the breathing of the cows, who had awakened, and scenting their enemy, raised their heads to look. Under the trees, farther away, the moon was pouring among the branches a shower of fine rays that fell to earth, flooding the leaves and casting on the path little patches of yellow light. Annette and Julio ran along, each seeming to have, on this serene night, the same joyful, unburdened heart, which expressed its exuberance in antics.

In the little open spaces, where the wave of moonlight descended as into a well, the young girl looked like a spirit, and the painter called her back, marveling at this vision in black with its clear, luminous face. Then, when she darted away again, he took the countess' hand and pressed it, often seeking her lips as they traversed the deeper shadows, as if the sight of Annette had revived the impatience of his heart.

At last they reached the edge of the plain, where

they could just discern afar, here and there, the groups of trees belonging to the farms. Through the milky mist that bathed the fields the horizon appeared limitless, and the soft silence, the living silence of that vast, warm, moonlit space was full of inexpressible hope, of that indefinable expectancy which make summer nights so sweet. Far up in the heavens a few long slender clouds looked like silver shells. Standing still for a few seconds, one could hear in that nocturnal peace a confused, continuous murmur of life, a thousand slight sounds, the harmony of which seemed like silence.

A quail in a neighboring field uttered her double cry, and Julio, his ears erect, glided furtively toward the two flute-like notes of the bird, Annette following as softly as he, holding her breath and crouching down.

"Ah," said the countess, standing alone with the painter, "why do moments like this pass so quickly? We can hold nothing, keep nothing. We have not even time to taste what is good. It is over already."

Olivier kissed her hand and replied, smiling:

"Oh, I cannot philosophize this evening! I belong to the present hour entirely."

"You do not love me as I love you," she murmured.

"Ah, do not——"

"No," she interrupted, "in me you love, as you said very truly before dinner, a woman who satisfies the needs of your heart, a woman who never has caused you a pain and who has put a little happiness into your life. I know that; I feel it. Yes, I have the consciousness, the ardent joy of having been good, useful and helpful to you. You have

loved, you still love all that you find agreeable in me, my attentions to you, my admiration, my wish to please you, my passion, the complete gift I made to you of my whole being. But it is not me you really love, do you know? Oh, I feel that as one feels a cold current of air. You love a thousand things about me—my beauty, which is fast leaving me, my devotion, the wit they say I possess, the opinion the world has of me and that which I have of you in my heart; but it is not me—me, nothing but myself—do you understand?"

He laughed in a soft and friendly way.

"No, I do not understand you very well. You attack me with reproaches that are quite unexpected."

"Oh, my God! I wish I could make you understand how I love you! I am always seeking some way of doing so, but can find none. When I think of you—and I am always thinking of you—I feel in the depths of my being an unspeakable longing to be yours, an irresistible need of giving myself to you even more completely. I should like to sacrifice myself in some absolute way, for there is nothing better, when one loves, than to give, to give always, all, all, life, thought, body, all that one has, to feel that one is giving and to be ready to risk anything to give still more. I love you so much that I love to suffer for you. I love even my anxieties, my torments, my jealousies, the pain I feel when I realize that you are no longer tender toward me. I love in you a some one that only I have discovered, a you which is not the you of the world that is admired and known, a you which is mine, which cannot change nor grow old, which I cannot cease to love, for the

eyes with which I look at it see but it alone. But one cannot say these things. There are no words to express them."

He repeated softly over and over:

"Dear, dear, dear Any!"

Julio came back, bounding toward them, without having found the quail, which had kept still at his approach. Annette followed him, breathless from running.

"I can't run any more," said she. "I will hook on to you, Monsieur Painter!"

She leaned on Olivier's free arm, and they returned, walking thus, he between them, under the shadow of the trees. They were silent. He walked on, possessed by them, permeated by a sort of feminine essence with which their contact filled him. He did not try to see them, since he had them near him; he even closed his eyes that he might feel their proximity the better. They guided him, led him, and he walked straight before him, fascinated by them, with the one on the left as well as the one on the right, without knowing, indeed, which was on the left or which on the right, which was mother, which was daughter. He abandoned himself willingly to the pleasure of that unpremeditated and exquisite sensuous delight. He even tried to blend them in his heart, not to distinguish them in his thought, and quieted desire with the charm of this confusion. Was it not only one woman beside him, composed of this mother and daughter, so much alike? And did not the daughter seem to have come to earth only for the purpose of reanimating his former love for the mother?

When he opened his eyes on entering the château

it seemed to him that he had just passed through the most delicious moments of his life; that he had experienced the strangest, the most puzzling, yet complete emotion a man might feel, intoxicated with one feeling of love through the seductiveness emanating from two women.

"Ah, what an exquisite evening!" said he, as soon as he found himself between them in the lamplight.

"I am not at all sleepy," said Annette. "I could pass the whole night walking when the weather is fine."

The countess looked at the clock.

"Oh, it is half-past eleven. You must go to bed, my child."

They separated and went to their own apartments. The young girl, who did not wish to go to bed, was the only one that went to sleep at once.

The next morning, at the usual hour, when the maid, after opening the curtains and the shutters, brought the tea and looked at her mistress, who was still drowsy, she said:

"Madame looks better to-day, already."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes. Madame's face looks more rested."

Though she had not yet looked at herself, the countess knew that this was true. Her heart was light; she did not feel it throb, and she felt once more as if she lived. The blood flowing in her veins was no longer coursing so rapidly as on the day before, hot and feverish, sending nervousness and restlessness through all her body, but gave her a sense of well-being and happy confidence.

When the maid had gone she went to look at her-

self in the mirror. She was a little surprised, for she felt so much better that she expected to find herself rejuvenated by several years in a single night. Then she realized the childishness of such a hope, and, after another glance, resigned herself to the knowledge that her complexion was only clearer, her eyes less fatigued, her lips a little redder than on the day before. As her soul was content, se could not feel sad, and she smiled, thinking: "Yes, in a few days I shall be quite myself again. I have gone through too much to recover so quickly."

But she remained seated a very long time before her toilet-table, upon which, before a beautiful mirror of cut crystal, were placed all her little ivory-handled instruments of coquetry, bearing her arms, surmounted by a coronet.

She handled them a long time with practiced fingers, carrying them from her lips to her temples with touches softer than a kiss, correcting imperfections, underlining the eyes, beautifying the eyelashes. At last, when she went downstairs, she felt almost sure that the first glance cast upon her would not be too unfavorable.

"Where is Monsieur Bertin?" she inquired of a servant she met in the vestibule.

"Monsieur Bertin is in the orchard, playing tennis with mademoiselle," the man replied.

She heard them from a distance counting the score. One after the other the deep voice of the painter and the light one of the young girl called: "Fifteen, thirty, forty, vantage, deuce, vantage, game!"

The orchard, where a space had been levelled for a tennis-court, was a great square grass-plot, planted

with apple-trees, enclosed by the park, the vegetable garden and the farms belonging to the castle. Along the slope that formed a boundary on three sides, like the defences of an intrenched camp, grew borders of various kinds of flowers, wild and cultivated, quantities of roses, pinks, heliotrope, fuchsias, mignonette, and many more, which, as Bertin said, gave the air a taste of honey. Besides this, the bees, whose hives, thatched with straw, lined the wall of the vegetable garden, covered the flowery field in their buzzing flight.

In the exact centre of this orchard a few apple-trees had been cut down, in order to make a good tennis court, and a tarred net, stretched across this space, separated it into two camps.

Annette, on one side, with bare head, her black skirt caught up, showing her ankles and half way up to her knee when she ran to catch a ball, dashed to and fro, with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, tired, out of breath from the sure and practiced play of her adversary.

He, in white flannels and a white tennis cap, awaited the ball coolly, judged its fall with precision, received and returned it without haste, without running, with the elegant pose, the passionate attention and professional skill which he displayed in all athletic sports.

It was Annette that spied her mother first.

"Good-morning, mamma!" she cried, "wait till we have finished this game."

That second's distraction made her lose. The quick, low ball passed against her, almost rolling, touched the ground and went out of the game.

Bertin shouted "Won!" and the young girl, sur-

prised, accused him of having profited by her inattention. Julio, trained to seek and find the lost balls, as if they were partridges fallen among the bushes, sprang behind her to get the ball rolling in the grass, seized it in his jaws and brought it back, wagging his tail.

The painter now greeted the countess, but, anxious to resume the game, animated by the contest, pleased to find himself so agile, he threw only a short, preoccupied glance at the face prepared so carefully for him, asking:

"Will you allow me, dear countess? I am afraid of taking cold and getting neuralgia."

"Oh, yes," the countess replied.

She sat down on a pile of hay, mowed that morning in order to give a clear field to the players, and, her heart suddenly touched with sadness, looked on.

Her daughter, irritated at losing continually, grew more animated, excited, uttered cries of vexation or of triumph and flew impetuously from one end of the court to the other. Often, in her swift movements, little locks of hair were loosened, rolled down and fell upon her shoulders. She seized them with impatient movements, and, holding the racket between her knees, fastened them up in place, thrusting hairpins into the golden mass.

And Bertin, from his position, cried to the countess:

"Isn't she pretty like that, and fresh as the day?"

Yes, she was young, she could run, grow warm, become red, let her hair fly, brave anything, dare everything, for all that only made her more beautiful.

Then, when they resumed their game with zest,

the countess, more and more melancholy, felt that Olivier preferred that game of ball, that childish sport, like the play of kittens, jumping after paper balls, to the sweetness of sitting beside her that warm morning and feeling her loving pressure against him.

When the first stroke of the breakfast bell sounded it seemed to her that some one had freed her, that a weight had been lifted from her heart. But as she returned, leaning on his arm, he said to her:

"I have been amusing myself like a boy. It is a great thing to be or to feel oneself young. Ah, yes, there is nothing like it. When we do not care to run any longer, it is all over with us."

When they left the table the countess, who on the preceding day had for the first time omitted her daily visit to the cemetery, proposed that they should go there together. So all three set out for the village.

They were obliged to go through some woods, through which ran a stream called "La Rainette," no doubt because of the frogs that peopled it; then they had to cross the end of a plain before arriving at the church, situated in the midst of a group of houses that sheltered the grocer, the baker, the butcher, the wine merchant and several other modest tradesmen who supplied the needs of the country folks.

They walked along in thoughtful silence, the recollection of the dead weighing on their spirits. Arrived at the grave, the women knelt and prayed a long time. The countess, motionless, bent low, her handkerchief to her eyes, for she feared to weep lest the tears run down her cheeks. She prayed, but not

as she had prayed until this day, in a sort of invocation to her mother, a despairing appeal penetrating beneath the marble of the tomb until she seemed to feel by the poignancy of her own anguish that the dead must hear her, listen to her, but a simple, hesitating and earnest utterance of the consecrated words of the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria.* She would not have had on this day sufficient strength and steadiness of nerve for that cruel unanswered communion with what might remain around the tomb of that vanished being who was concealed within it. Other anxieties had penetrated her woman's heart, had agitated, wounded and distracted her; and her fervent prayer rose to Heaven, full of vague supplications. She implored God, the inexorable God who has cast all of us poor creatures on the earth, to take pity on her as well as on the one He had recalled to Himself.

She could not have told what she was asking of God, so vague and confused were her fears still; but she felt the need of Divine aid, of a superhuman support against approaching dangers and inevitable sorrows.

Annette, with closed eyes, having also murmured the formulas, sank into a reverie, for she did not wish to rise before her mother rose.

Olivier Bertin looked at them, thinking that he never had seen a more ravishing picture, and somewhat regretful that it was out of the question for him to make a sketch of the scene.

On their way back they talked of human life, softly stirring those bitter and poetic ideas of a tender but pessimistic philosophy, which is a frequent subject of conversation between men and women

whom life has wounded a little and whose hearts blend as they sympathize with each other's grief.

Annette, who was not ripe for such thoughts, left them frequently to gather wild flowers beside the road.

But Olivier, desiring to keep her near him, nervous at seeing her continually darting away, never removed his eyes from her. He was irritated that she should show more interest in the colors of the plants than in the words he spoke. He experienced an inexpressible dissatisfaction at not being able to charm her, to dominate her, as he had captivated her mother; and he felt a desire to hold out his hand and seize her, hold her, forbid her to go away. He felt that she was too alert, too young, too indifferent, too free—free as a bird, or a little dog that will not come back, will not obey, that has independence in its veins, that sweet instinct of liberty which neither voice nor whip has yet vanquished.

In order to attract her he talked of gayer things, and at times he questioned her, trying to awaken her feminine curiosity so that she would listen; but one would think that the capricious wind of heaven was blowing through Annette's head that day, as it blew across the undulating grain, carrying away and scattering her attention into space, for she hardly made even the commonplace replies expected of her and uttered with an absent air as they came up to her, returning at once to her flowers. Finally he became exasperated, filled with a childish impatience, and as she ran up to beg her mother to carry her first bouquet so that she could gather another, he caught her by the elbow and held her arm, so that she could not escape again. She struggled, laughing,

pulling with all her strength to get away from him. Then, moved by masculine instinct, he tried gentler means, and, not being able to win her attention, he tried to purchase it by tempting her coquetry.

"Tell me," he said, "what flower you prefer, and I will have it made as a brooch for you."

She hesitated, surprised.

"What, a brooch?"

"In stones of the same color; in rubies if it is the poppy; in sapphires if it is the cornflower, with a little leaf in emeralds."

Annette's face lighted up with that affectionate joy with which promises and presents animate a woman's countenance.

"The cornflower," said she, "it is so pretty."

"The cornflower it shall be. We will go to order it as soon as we return to Paris."

She no longer tried to leave him, attracted by the thought of the jewel she already tried to see, to imagine.

"Does it take very long to make a thing like that?" she asked.

He laughed, feeling that he had caught her.

"I don't know; it depends upon the difficulties. We will make the jeweler attend to it at once."

A dismal thought suddenly crossed her mind.

"But I cannot wear it since I am in deep mourning!"

He had passed his arm under that of the young girl and pressed it against him.

"Well, you can keep the brooch until you leave off mourning," said he; "that will not prevent you from looking at it."

As on the preceding evening, he was walking

between them, held captive between their shoulders, and in order to see their eyes, of a similar blue dotted with tiny black spots, raised to his, he spoke to them in turn, moving his head first toward the one, then toward the other. As the bright sunlight now shone on them, he did not so fully confound the countess with Annette, but he did more and more associate the daughter with the new-born remembrances of what the mother had been. He had a strong desire to embrace both, the one to find again upon cheek and neck a little of that pink and white freshness which he had formerly tasted, and which he saw now reproduced as by a miracle; the other because he loved her as he always had, and felt that from her came the powerful appeal of long habit. He even realized at that moment that his desire and affection for her, which for some time had been waning, had revived at the sight of her resuscitated youth.

Annette went away again to gather more flowers. This time Olivier did not call her back. It was as if the contact of her arm and the satisfaction of knowing that he had given her pleasure had quieted him; but he followed all her movements with the enjoyment one feels in seeing the persons or things that captivate and intoxicate our vision. When she returned with a large cluster of flowers he drew a deep breath, seeking unconsciously to inhale something of her, a little of her breath or the warmth of her skin in the air stirred by her running. He looked at her, enraptured, as one watches the dawn or listens to music, with thrills of delight when she bent, rose again or raised her arms to arrange her hair. And then, more and more, hour by hour, she

evoked in him the memory of the past! Her laughter, her pretty ways, her motions brought back to his lips the savor of former kisses given and returned. She made of the far-off past, of which he had forgotten the precise sensation, something like a dream in the present; she confused epochs, dates, the ages of his heart, and rekindling the embers of cooled emotions, she blended, without his realizing it, yesterday with to-morrow, recollection with hope.

He asked himself as he searched his memory whether the countess in her brightest bloom had had that supple charm like a young fawn, that bold, capricious, irresistible grace of a bounding, running animal. No. She had had a riper bloom, but was less untamed. First, a child of the city, then a woman, never having imbibed the air of the fields and lived in the grass, she had grown pretty under the shadow of walls and not under the sunlight of heaven.

When they reëntered the château the countess began to write letters at her little low table in the bay window. Annette went up to her own room and the painter went out again to walk slowly, cigar in mouth, hands clasped behind him, through the winding paths of the park. But he did not go away so far that he lost sight of the white façade or the pointed roof of the castle. As soon as it disappeared behind groups of trees or clusters of shrubbery, a shadow seemed to fall over his heart, as when a cloud hides the sun; and when it reappeared through the apertures in the foliage he paused a few seconds to gaze at the two rows of tall windows. Then he resumed his walk. He felt disturbed, but content. Content with what? With everything.

The air seemed pure to him, life was good that day. He once more felt as foolish as a small boy, longing to run and catch the yellow butterflies fluttering over the lawn. He hummed little airs from the opera. Several times he repeated the celebrated phrase by Gounod: *"Laisse-moi contempler ton visage,"* discovering in it a profoundly tender expression which he had never felt as he did now.

Suddenly he asked himself how it was that he had so soon become different from his usual self. Yesterday, in Paris, dissatisfied with everything, disgusted, irritated; to-day calm, satisfied with everything—one would say that some benevolent god had changed his soul. "That same kind god," he thought, "might well have changed my body at the same time and rejuvenated me a little." Suddenly he saw Julio hunting among the bushes. He called him, and when the dog ran up to put his finely formed head, with its curly ears, under his hand, he sat down on the grass to pet him more comfortably, spoke gentle words to him, laid him on his knees, and growing tender as he caressed the animal, he kissed it, after the fashion of women whose hearts are touched by trifles.

After dinner, instead of going out as on the evening before, they spent the time in the drawing-room.

Suddenly the countess said: "We must leave here soon."

"Oh, don't speak of that yet!" Olivier exclaimed. "You would not leave Roncières when I was not here; now that I have come, you think only of going away."

"But, my dear friend," said she, "we three cannot remain here indefinitely."

"It does not necessarily follow that we need stay indefinitely, but just a few days. How many times have I stayed at your house for whole weeks?"

"Yes, but under different circumstances, when the house was open to every one."

"Oh, mamma," said Annette coaxingly, "let us stay a few days more, just two or three. He is teaching me so well how to play tennis. It annoys me to lose, but afterward I am glad to have made such progress."

Only that morning the countess had been planning to make this mysterious visit of her friend's last until Sunday, and now she wished to go away, without knowing why. That day which she had hoped would be such a happy one had left in her soul an inexpressible but poignant sadness, a causeless apprehension, as tenacious and confused as a presentiment.

When she was once more alone in her room she even sought to define this new access of melancholy.

Had she experienced one of those imperceptible emotions whose touch has been so slight that the mind does not remember it, but whose vibrations still stir the most sensitive chords of the heart? Perhaps? Which? She recalled, certainly, some little annoyances, in the thousand degrees of sentiment through which she had passed, each minute having its own. But they were too petty to have thus disheartened her. "I am exacting," she thought. "I have no right to torment myself in this way."

She opened her window to breathe the night air and leaned on the window-sill, gazing at the moon.

A slight noise made her look down. Olivier was walking up and down before the castle. "Why did

he say that he was going to his room?" she thought; "why did he not tell me he was going out again? Why did he not ask me to come with him? He knows very well that it would have made me so happy. What is he thinking of now?"

This idea that he had not wished her company on this walk, that he had preferred to go out alone this beautiful night, alone, with a cigar in his mouth, for she could see its fiery-red point—alone, when he might have given her the joy of taking her with him; this idea that he had not continual need of her, that he did not desire her always, created within her soul a new ferment of bitterness.

She was about to close the window, that she might not see him or be tempted to call to him, when he raised his eyes and saw her.

"Well, are you star-gazing, countess?"

"Yes," she answered. "You also, as it appears."

"Oh, I am simply smoking."

She could not resist the desire to ask, "Why did you not tell me you were going out?"

"I only wanted to smoke a cigar. I am coming in now."

"Then good-night, my friend."

"Good-night, countess."

She retired as far as her low chair, sat down in it and wept; and her maid, who was called to assist her to bed, seeing her red eyes, said with compassion:

"Ah, madame is going to make a sad face for herself again to-morrow."

The countess slept badly. She was feverish and had nightmare. As soon as she awoke she opened her window and her curtains to look at herself in the mirror. Her features were drawn, her eyelids

swollen, her skin looked yellow, and she felt such violent grief because of this that she wished to say she was ill and to keep her bed, so that she need not appear until evening.

Then suddenly she felt an irresistible longing to go away, to depart immediately by the first train, to leave the country, where one could see too clearly by the broad light of the fields the ineffaceable marks of sorrow and of life itself. In Paris one lives in the half shadow of apartments, where heavy curtains, even at noontime, admit only a softened light. She would be herself again there, beautiful, with the pallor one should have in that discreetly softened light. Then Annette's face rose before her eyes—so fresh and pink, with slightly dishevelled hair, as when she was playing tennis. She understood then the unknown anxiety from which her soul had suffered. She was not jealous of her daughter's beauty! No, certainly not, but she felt, she acknowledged for the first time that she must never again show herself by Annette's side in the bright sunlight.

She rang, and before drinking her tea she gave orders for departure, wrote some telegrams, even ordering her dinner for that evening by telegram, settled her bills in the country, gave her final instructions, arranged everything in less than an hour, a prey to feverish and increasing impatience.

When she went downstairs Annette and Olivier, who had been told of her decision, questioned her with surprise. Then, seeing that she would not give any precise reason for this sudden departure, they grumbled a little and showed their annoyance until they separated at the station in Paris.

The countess, holding out her hand to the painter, said: "Will you dine with us to-morrow?"

"Certainly I will come," he replied, rather sulkily. "All the same, what you have done was not nice. We were so happy down there, all three of us."

CHAPTER III

A DANGEROUS WARNING

As soon as the countess was alone with her daughter in the carriage which was taking her home she suddenly felt tranquil and quieted, as if she had just passed through a serious crisis. She breathed easier, smiled at the houses, recognized with joy the look of the city, whose details all true Parisians seem to carry in their eyes and hearts. Each shop she passed suggested those beyond it, on a line along the Boulevard, and the tradesman's face so often seen behind his showcase. She felt saved. From what? Reassured. Why? Confident. Of what?

When the carriage stopped under the arch of the porte-cochère she alighted quickly and entered, as if flying, the shadow of the stairway; then passed to the shadow of her drawing-room, then to that of her bedroom. There she remained standing a few moments, glad to be at home, in security, in the dim and misty daylight of Paris, which hardly gives any light, compelling one to guess as much as to see where one may show or conceal as much as he pleases, and the unreasoning recollection of the dazzling glare that bathed the country remained in her like an impression of past suffering.

When she went down to dinner, her husband, who had just arrived at home, embraced her affectionately and said, smiling: "Ah, ha! I knew very well that our friend Bertin would bring you back. It was very clever of me to send him after you."

Annette responded gravely, in the peculiar tone she affected when she said something in jest without smiling:

"Oh, he had a great deal of trouble. Mamma could not make up her mind to it."

The countess said nothing, but felt a little confused.

The doors being closed to visitors, no one called that evening. Madame de Guilleroy passed the whole of the following day in different shops, choosing or ordering what she needed. She had loved, from her youth, almost from her infancy, to stand and try on garments before the mirrors of the great shops. From the moment she returned home she rejoiced at the thought of all the details of that tedious repetition in the green-room of Parisian life. She adored the rustle of the dresses worn by the salesgirls who hastened forward to meet her, all smiles, with their offers, their queries; and madame the dressmaker, the milliner or corset-maker was to her a person of consequence, whom she treated as an artist when she expressed an opinion in order to obtain advice. She enjoyed even more to feel herself in the skillful hands of the young girl who undressed her and dressed her again, turning her round gently before her own gracious reflection. The little shiver that the touch of their fingers produced on her skin, her neck or in her hair was one of the best and sweetest

little pleasures that belonged to her life of a woman of fashion.

This day, however, it was with a certain anxiety that she passed before those candid mirrors, without her veil or hat. Her first visit to the milliner's reassured her. The three hats which she chose were wonderfully becoming, she could not doubt it; and when the milliner said, with an air of conviction, "Oh, Madame la Comtesse, blondes should never leave off mourning!" she went away much pleased and entered other shops with a heart full of confidence.

She found at home a note from the duchess, who had called to see her, saying that she would return in the evening. Then she wrote some letters; then she fell into dreamy reverie for some time, surprised that this simple change of place had banished into what now seemed a far-distant past the great misfortune that had overwhelmed her. She could not even believe that her return from Roncières dated from the day before only, so greatly had her condition of mind become modified since her return to Paris, as if that little change had healed her wounds.

Bertin, arriving at dinner-time, exclaimed on seeing her:

"You are dazzling this evening!"

And this exclamation sent a warm wave of happiness through her being.

As they were leaving the table the count, who had a passion for billiards, offered to play a game with Bertin, and the two ladies accompanied them to the billiard-room, where coffee was served.

The men were still playing when the duchess was announced, and they all returned to the drawing-

room. Madame de Corbelle and her husband appeared at the same time, their voices full of tears. For some minutes it seemed, from their mournful tones, that every one was about to weep, but little by little, after a few tender words and inquiries, another current of thought set in. The voices took on a more cheerful tone, and every one began to talk naturally, as if the shadow of the misfortune that had saddened them had suddenly been dissipated.

Then Bertin rose, took Annette by the hand, led her under the portrait of her mother, in the ray of light from the reflector, and said:

"Isn't this amazing?"

The duchess was so greatly surprised that she seemed dazed. She repeated many times: "Heavens! is it possible? Heavens! is it possible? It is like some one raised from the dead. To think that I did not see that when I came in! Oh, my little Any, I find you again, I, who knew you so well at that time in your first mourning as a woman—no, in your second, for you had already lost your father. Oh, that Annette, in black like that—why, it is her mother come back to earth! What a miracle! Without that portrait we never should have perceived it. Your daughter resembles you now very much, but she resembles that portrait much more."

Musadieu now appeared, having heard of Madame de Guilleroy's return, as he wished to be one of the first to offer her the "homage of his sorrowful sympathy."

He interrupted his first speech on perceiving the young girl standing against the frame, illumined by the same brilliant light, appearing like the living sister of the painting.

"Ah, that is certainly one of the most astonishing things I ever have seen," he exclaimed.

The Corbelles, whose convictions always followed established opinions, marvelled in their turn with a little less exuberant ardor.

The countess' heart seemed to contract, little by little, as if all these exclamations of astonishment had hurt it. Without speaking, she looked at her daughter standing beside her portrait, and a sudden nervous feeling came over her. She longed to cry out: "Oh, keep still! I know very well that she resembles me!"

Until the end of the evening she remained in a melancholy mood, having again lost the confidence she had felt the day before.

Bertin was chatting with her when the Marquis de Farandal was announced. As soon as the painter saw him enter and approach the hostess he rose and glided behind her armchair, murmuring: "Well, this is charming! Here comes that great blockhead now." Then, making a détour of the apartment, he reached the door and departed.

After receiving the greetings of the newcomer, the countess looked round to find Olivier, to resume their conversation in which she had been interested. Not seeing him, she asked:

"What, has the great man gone?"

"I believe so, my dear," her husband answered; "I just saw him taking English leave."

She was surprised, reflected a few moments and then began to talk to the marquis.

Her intimate friends, however, discreetly took their leave early, for she had only half opened her door, as it were, so soon after her affliction.

Later, as she lay in bed, all the grief that had overwhelmed her in the country came back. It took a more distinct form; she felt it more keenly. She realized that she was growing old!

That evening, for the first time, she had understood that, in her own drawing-room, where until now she alone had been admired, complimented, flattered, loved, another, her daughter, was taking her place. She had comprehended this suddenly, when feeling that every one's homage was paid to Annette. In that kingdom, the house of a pretty woman, where she will permit no one to overshadow her, avoiding with discreet and unceasing care all disadvantageous comparisons, where she allows the entrance of her equals only to attempt to make them her vassals, she saw plainly that her daughter was about to become the sovereign. How strange it was, that contraction of her heart when all eyes were turned upon Annette, whose hand Bertin was holding as they stood before the portrait! She herself felt as if she had suddenly disappeared, dispossessed, dethroned. Every one looked at Annette; no one turned to look at her! She was so accustomed to hear compliments and flattery, whenever her portrait was admired, she was so sure of eulogistic phrases, which she had little regarded but which pleased her nevertheless, that this desertion of herself, this unexpected defection, this admiration intended wholly for her daughter, had moved, astonished and hurt her more than if it had been a question of no matter what rivalry under any kind of conditions.

But, as she had one of those natures which, in all crises, react after the first blow, struggle and find

causes for consolation, she reasoned that, once her dear little daughter was married, when they should no longer live under the same roof, she herself would no longer be compelled to endure that incessant comparison which was beginning to be too painful for her under the eyes of her friend Olivier.

However, the shock had been too much for her that evening. She was feverish and hardly slept at all. In the morning she awoke weary and overcome by extreme lassitude, and then there arose within her an irresistible longing to be comforted again, to be succored, to ask help from some one who could cure all her ills, all her mortal and physical ailments.

Indeed, she felt so ill at ease and weak that she thought of consulting her physician. Perhaps she was about to be seriously ill, for it was not natural that in a few hours she should pass through those successive phases of suffering and relief. So she sent him a telegram and awaited his coming.

He arrived about eleven o'clock. He was one of those dignified, fashionable physicians whose decorations and titles guarantee their ability, whose tact at least equals mere skill and who have, above all, when treating women, soothing words that are surer than medicines.

He entered, bowed, looked at his patient and said with a smile: "Come, this is not a very serious case. With eyes like yours one is never very ill."

She felt immediate gratitude to him for this beginning, and told him of her troubles, her weakness, her nervousness and melancholy. Then she mentioned, without laying too much stress on the matter, her distressingly ill appearance. After listening to her with an attentive ear, though asking no

questions except as to her appetite, as if he knew well the secret nature of this feminine ailment, he sounded her, examined her, felt of her shoulders with the tips of his fingers, lifted her arms, having undoubtedly met her thought and understood with the shrewdness of a practitioner who lifts all veils that she was consulting him more for her beauty than for her health. Then he said:

"Yes, we are a little anæmic and have some nervous troubles. That is not surprising, since you have experienced such a great affliction. I will write you a little prescription that will set you right again. But, above all, you must eat strengthening food, take beef tea, no water, but drink beer. I will indicate an excellent brand. Do not tire yourself by late hours, but walk as much as you can. Sleep a good deal and grow a little plumper. This is all that I can advise you, my fair patient."

She had listened to him with deep interest, trying to guess at what his words implied. She caught at the last word.

"Yes, I am too thin," said she. "I was a little too stout at one time, and perhaps I weakened myself by dieting."

"Without any doubt. There is no harm in remaining thin when one has always been so; but when one grows thin on principle it is always at the expense of something else. Happily, that can be soon remedied. Good-by, madame."

She felt better already, more alert, and she wished to send for the prescribed beer for her luncheon at its headquarters, in order to obtain it quite fresh.

She was just leaving the table when Bertin was announced.

"It is I again," said he, "always I. I have come to ask you something. Have you anything particular to do this afternoon?"

"No, nothing. Why?"

"And Annette?"

"Nothing also."

"Then can you come to the studio about four o'clock?"

"Yes, but for what purpose?"

"I am sketching the face of my *Rêverie,* of which I spoke to you when I asked you whether Annette might pose for me a few moments. It would render me a great service if I could have her for only an hour to-day. Are you willing?"

The countess hesitated, annoyed, without knowing the reason why. But she replied:

"Very well, my friend; we shall be with you at four o'clock."

"Thank you! You are goodness itself!"

He went away to prepare his canvas and study his subject, so that he need not tire his model too much.

Then the countess went out alone, on foot, to finish her shopping. She went down to the great central streets, then walked slowly up the Boulevard Malesherbes, for she felt as if her legs were giving way. As she passed Saint Augustin's she was seized with a desire to enter the church and rest. She pushed open the leather-covered door, sighed with satisfaction on breathing the cool air of the lofty nave, took a chair and sat down.

She was religious as very many Parisians are religious. She believed in God without a doubt, not being able to admit the existence of the universe

without the existence of a creator. But associating, as does every one, the attributes of divinity with the nature of the created matter that she beheld with her own eyes, she almost personified the Eternal God with what she knew of His work, without having a very clear idea as to what this mysterious Maker might really be.

She believed in Him firmly, adored Him theoretically, feared Him very vaguely, for she did not profess to understand His intentions or His will, having a very limited confidence in the priests, whom she regarded merely as the sons of peasants revolting from military service. Her father, a middle-class Parisian, never had imposed upon her any particular principles of devotion, and she had lived on, thinking little about religious matters until her marriage. Then, her new station in life entailing a stricter outward observance of her obligations toward the Church, she had conformed punctiliously to these light duties.

She was lady patroness to numerous and very well-known infant asylums, never failed to attend mass at one o'clock on Sundays, gave alms for herself directly and for society through an abbé, the vicar of her parish.

She had often prayed, from a sense of duty, as a soldier mounts guard at a general's door. Sometimes she had prayed because her heart was sad, especially when she suspected Olivier of infidelity to her. At such times, without confiding to Heaven the cause of her appeal, treating God with the same naïve hypocrisy that is shown to a husband, she asked Him to succor her. When her father had died, long before, and again quite recently, at her mother's death, she

had had violent crises of religious fervor and had passionately implored Him who watches over us and consoles us.

And now behold! to-day, in that church where she had entered by chance, she suddenly felt a profound need to pray, not for some one nor for some thing, but for herself, for herself alone, as she had already prayed the other day at her mother's grave. She must have help from some source, and she called on God now as she had summoned the physician that very morning.

She remained a long time on her knees, in the deep silence of the church, broken only by the sound of footsteps. Then suddenly, as if a clock had struck in her heart, she awoke from her memories, drew out her watch, and was startled to see that it was already four o'clock. She hastened away to take her daughter to the studio, where Olivier must already be expecting them.

They found the artist in his studio, studying upon the canvas the pose of his *Rêverie*. He wished to reproduce exactly what he had seen in the Parc Monceau while walking with Annette: a young girl, dreaming, with an open book upon her knees. He had hesitated as to whether he should make her plain or pretty. If she were ugly she would have more character, would arouse more thought and emotion, would contain more philosophy. If pretty, she would be more seductive, would diffuse more charm and would please better.

The desire to make a study from his little friend decided him. The *Rêveuse* should be pretty and therefore might realize her poetic vision one day or

other; whereas, if ugly, she would remain condemned to a dream without hope and without end.

As soon as the two ladies entered Olivier said, rubbing his hands:

"Well, Mademoiselle Nané, we are going to work together, it seems!"

The countess seemed anxious. She sat in an armchair and watched Olivier as he placed an iron garden-chair in the right light. He opened his bookcase to get a book, then asked, hesitating:

"What does your daughter read?"

"Dear me! anything you like! Give her a volume of Victor Hugo."

"La Légende des Siècles?"

"That will do."

"Little one, sit down here," he continued, "and take this volume of verse. Look for page—page 336, where you will find a poem entitled *'Les Pauvres Gens.'* Absorb it, as one drinks the best wines, slowly, word by word, and let it intoxicate you and move you. Then close the book, raise your eyes, think and dream. Now I will go and prepare my brushes."

He went into a corner to put the colors on his palette, but as he squeezed the leaden tubes, whence issued slender, twisting snakes of color, he turned from time to time to look at the young girl absorbed in her reading.

His heart seemed to contract, his fingers trembled, he no longer knew what he was doing and got his colors mixed as he blended the little piles of paint, so strongly was he affected at the reawakening, the sudden resurrection of this apparition in this very spot after twelve years.

Annette had now finished her reading and was looking straight before her. Approaching her, Olivier saw in her eyes two bright drops which overflowed and ran down her cheeks. He was thrilled with one of those shocks that make a man forget himself, and turning toward the countess he murmured:

"God! how beautiful she is!"

But he remained stupefied at the ghastly and convulsed face of Madame de Guilleroy. Her large eyes, full of a sort of terror, gazed at her daughter and at the painter. He approached her, suddenly touched with anxiety.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I wish to speak to you."

Rising, she said hastily to Annette: "Wait a moment, my child; I have a word to say to Monsieur Bertin."

She passed swiftly into the little drawing-room near by, where he often made his visitors wait. He followed her, his head confused, understanding nothing. As soon as they were alone, she seized his hands and stammered:

"Olivier! Olivier, I beg you not to make her pose for you!"

"But why?" he murmured, disturbed.

"Why? why?" she said precipitately. "He asks it! You do not feel it, then, yourself? Why? Oh, I should have guessed it sooner myself, but I only discovered it this moment. I cannot tell you anything now. Go and find my daughter. Tell her that I am ill; fetch a cab, and come to see me in an hour. I will receive you alone."

"But, really, what is the matter with you?"

She seemed on the verge of hysterics.

"Leave me! I cannot speak here. Get my daughter and call a cab."

He had to obey and reëntered the studio. Annette, unsuspicious, had resumed her reading, her heart overflowing with sadness at the poetic and mournful story.

"Your mother is indisposed," said Olivier. "She became very ill when she went into the other room. Go to her. I will bring some ether."

He went out, ran to get a flask from his room and returned.

He found them weeping in each other's arms. Annette, moved by "Les Pauvres Gens," allowed her feelings full sway, and the countess was somewhat solaced by blending her grief with that sweet sorrow, in mingling her tears with those of her daughter.

He waited for some time, not daring to speak. He looked at them, his own heart oppressed with an incomprehensible melancholy.

"Well," said he at last, "are you better?"

"Yes, a little," the countess replied. "It was nothing. Have you ordered a carriage?"

"Yes, it will come directly."

"Thank you, my friend—it is nothing. I have had too much sorrow for a long time."

"The carriage is here," a servant announced.

And Bertin, full of secret anxiety, escorted his friend, pale and almost swooning, to the door, feeling her heart throb against his arm.

When he was alone he asked himself what was the matter with her and why had she made this scene. And he began to seek a reason, coming close to the

truth without being willing to discover it. Finally he began to suspect. "Why," said he to himself, "is it possible she believes that I am making love to her daughter? No, that would be too absurd!" And combating with ingenious and loyal arguments that supposititious conviction, he felt indignant that she could for an instant have suspected that his sane, almost paternal affection, could have any taint of gallantry. He gradually became annoyed with the countess, not allowing that she had the least right to suspect him of such villainy, of an infamy so unqualifiable; and he resolved that when he saw her later he would express his views pretty plainly.

He soon left his studio to go to her house, impatient for an explanation. On the way he prepared, with a growing irritation, the arguments and phrases that should justify him and avenge him for such a suspicion.

He found her in a reclining chair, her face changed by suffering.

"Well," said he dryly, "explain to me, my dear friend, the strange scene that just occurred."

"What, you do not yet understand it?" she said in a broken voice.

"No, I confess I do not."

"Come, Olivier, look well into your heart."

"My heart?"

"Yes, at the bottom of your heart."

"I don't understand. Explain yourself better."

"Look well into the depths of your heart and see whether you find nothing there that is dangerous for you and for me."

"I repeat that I do not comprehend you. I guess

that there is something in your imagination, but in my own conscience I see nothing."

"I am not speaking of your conscience, but of your heart."

"I cannot guess enigmas. I entreat you to be more clear."

Then, slowly raising her hands, she took the hands of the painter and held them, and, as if each word broke her heart, she said:

"Take care, my friend, or you will fall in love with my daughter!"

He withdrew his hands abruptly, and with the impulse of innocence which combats a shameful accusation, with animated gesture and increasing excitement, he defended himself, accusing her in her turn of having suspected him unjustly.

She let him talk for some time, obstinately incredulous, sure of what she had said. Then she resumed:

"But I do not suspect you, my friend. You were ignorant of what was passing within you, as I was ignorant of it until this morning. You treat me as if I had accused you of making love to Annette. Oh, no, no! I know how loyal you are, worthy of all esteem and of every confidence. I only beg you, I entreat you to look into the depths of your heart and see whether the affection which, in spite of yourself, you are beginning to have for my daughter, has not a characteristic a little different from simple friendship."

Now he was offended, and, growing still more excited, he began once more to plead his loyalty, just as he had argued all alone in the street.

She waited until he had finished his defence; then,

without anger, but without being shaken in her conviction, though frightfully pale, she murmured:

"Olivier, I know very well all that you have just said to me, and I think as you do. But I am sure that I do not deceive myself. Listen, reflect, understand. My daughter resembles me too much, she is too much what I was once when you began to love me, that you should not begin to love her, too."

"Then," he exclaimed, "you dare to throw in my face such a thing as that on this simple supposition and ridiculous reasoning: 'He loves me; my daughter resembles me; therefore he will love her'!"

But, seeing the countess' face changing more and more, he continued in a softer tone:

"Now, my dear Any, it is precisely because I do find you once more in her that this young girl pleases me so much. It is you, you alone, that I love when I look at her."

"Yes, and it is just that from which I begin to suffer and which makes me so anxious. You are not yet aware of what you feel, but by and by you will no longer be able to deceive yourself regarding it."

"Any, I assure you that you are mad."

"Do you wish proofs?"

"Yes."

"You had never come to Roncières in three years, in spite of my entreaties. But you rushed down there when it was proposed that you should come to fetch us."

"Oh, indeed! You reproach me for not leaving you alone down there, knowing that you were ill, after your mother's death!"

"So be it! I do not insist. But this is it: the desire to see Annette again is so imperious with you

that you could not pass this day without asking me to take her to your studio, under the pretext of posing her."

"And you do not suppose it was you I wished to see?"

"At this moment you are arguing against yourself, trying to convince yourself—but you do not deceive me. Listen again: Why did you leave abruptly, the night before last, when the Marquis de Farandal entered? Do you know why?"

He hesitated, very much surprised, disturbed, disarmed by this observation. Then he said slowly:

"Why—I hardly know—I was tired, and then, to be candid, that imbecile makes me nervous."

"Since when?"

"Always."

"Pardon me, I have heard you sing his praises. You liked him once. Be quite sincere, Olivier."

He reflected a few moments. Then choosing his words, he said:

"Yes, it is possible that the great love I have for you makes me love so much everything that belongs to you as to modify my opinion of that bore, whom I might meet occasionally with indifference, but whom I should not like to see in your house almost every day."

"My daughter's house will not be mine. But this is sufficient. I know the uprightness of your heart. I know that you will reflect deeply on what I have just said to you. When you have reflected you will understand that I have pointed out a great danger to you, while yet there is time to escape it. And you will beware. Now let us talk of something else, will you?"

He did not insist, but he was much disturbed. He no longer knew what to think, though indeed he had need for reflection. He went away after a quarter of an hour of unimportant conversation.

CHAPTER IV

SWEET POISON

With slow steps, Olivier returned to his own house, troubled as if he had just learned some shameful family secret. He tried to sound his heart, to see clearly within himself, to read those intimate pages of the inner book which seem fastened together, and which sometimes only a strange hand can turn over by separating them. Certainly he did not believe himself in love with Annette. The countess, whose watchful jealousy never slept, had foreseen this danger from afar, and had signaled it before it even existed. But might that peril exist to-morrow, the day after, in a month? It was the frank question that he tried to answer sincerely. It was true that the child stirred his instincts of tenderness, but these instincts in man are so numerous that the dangerous ones should not be confounded with the inoffensive. Thus, he adored animals, especially cats, and could not see their silky fur without being seized with an irresistible sensuous desire to caress their soft, undulating backs and kiss their electric fur.

The attraction that impelled him toward this girl slightly resembled those obscure yet innocent desires that go to make up part of all the ceaseless and un-

appeasable vibrations of human nerves. His artist's eye, as well as his eye as a man, was captivated by her freshness, by that bud of bright, beautiful life, by that essence of youth that glowed in her; and his heart, full of memories of his long friendship with the countess, finding in the extraordinary resemblance of Annette to her mother a reawakening of old feelings, of emotions sleeping since the beginning of his love, had been startled perhaps by the sensation of an awakening. An awakening? Yes! It was that! This idea gave him some light on the subject. He felt that he had awakened after years of sleep. If he had loved the young girl without being aware of it, he would have experienced beside her that rejuvenation of his whole being which creates a new man as soon as the flame of a fresh desire is kindled within him. No, the child had only breathed upon the former fire. It had always been the mother that he loved, but a little more now than latterly, no doubt, because of her daughter, this reincarnation of herself. And he formulated this decision with the reassuring sophism: "One loves but once! The heart may often be affected at meeting some other being, for every one exercises on others either attraction or repulsion. All these influences create friendship, caprices, desire for possession, quick and fleeting ardors, but not real love. That this love may exist it is necessary that two beings should be so truly born for each other, should be linked together in so many different ways, by so many similar tastes, by so many affinities of body, of mind, and of character, and so many ties of all kinds that the whole shall form a union of bonds. That which we love, in

short, is not so much Madame X. or Monsieur Z.; it is a woman or a man, a creature without a name, something sprung from Nature, that great female, with organs, a form, a heart, a mind, a combination of attributes which like a magnet attract our organs, our eyes, our lips, our hearts, our thoughts, all our appetites, sensual as well as intellectual. We love a type, that is, the reunion in one single person of all the human qualities that may separately attract us in others."

For him, the Comtesse de Guilleroy had been this type, and their long-standing friendship, of which he had not wearied, proved it to him beyond a doubt. Now, Annette so much resembled physically what her mother had been as to deceive the eye; so there was nothing astonishing in the fact that this man's heart had been surprised, if even it had not been wholly captured. He had adored one woman! Another woman was born of her, almost her counterpart. He could not prevent himself from bestowing on the latter a little tender remnant of the passionate attachment he had had for the former. There was no harm nor danger in that. His eyes and his memory alone allowed themselves to be deluded by this appearance of resurrection; but his impulse had never strayed, for never had he felt the least stirring of desire for the young girl.

However, the countess had reproached him with being jealous of the marquis! Was it true? Again he examined his conscience severely, and decided that as a matter of fact he was indeed a little jealous. What was there astonishing in that, after all? Are we not constantly jealous of men who pay court to no matter what woman? Does not one

experience in the street, at a restaurant, or a theatre, a little feeling of enmity toward the gentleman who is passing or who enters with a lovely girl on his arm? Every possessor of a woman is a rival, a triumphant male, a conqueror envied by all the other males. And then, without considering these physiological reasons, if it were natural that he should have for Annette a somewhat exaggerated sympathy, owing to his love for her mother, was it not natural also that he should feel in his heart a little masculine hatred of the future husband? He could conquer this unworthy feeling without much trouble.

But in the depths of his heart he still felt a sort of bitter discontent with himself and with the countess. Would not their everyday intercourse be rendered awkward by the fact that he was aware of her suspicion? Should he not be compelled to watch with tiresome and scrupulous attention all that he said and did, his very looks, his slightest attitude in presence of the young girl? for all that he might do or say would appear suspicious to the mother. He reached his home in a gloomy mood and began to smoke cigarettes, with the vehemence of an irritated man who uses ten matches to light his tobacco. He tried in vain to work. His hand, his eye, and his brain seemed to have lost the knack of painting, as if they had forgotten it, or never had known and practised the art. He had taken up a little canvas to finish a sketch—a street corner, at which a blind man stood singing—and he looked at it with unconquerable indifference, with such a lack of power to continue it that he sat down before it, palette in hand, and

forgot it, continuing to gaze at it fixedly though his thoughts were elsewhere.

Then, suddenly, impatience at the slowness of time, at the interminable minutes, began to wear on him. What should he do until he could go to the club for dinner, since he could not work at home? The very thought of the streets wearied him, filled him with disgust for the sidewalks, the pedestrians, the carriages and shops; and the idea of paying visits that day, to no matter whom, aroused in him an instantaneous hatred for every one he knew.

Then, what should he do? Should he pace to and fro in his studio, looking at the clock at every turn, watching the displacement of the long hand every few seconds? Ah, he knew well those walks from the door to the cabinet, covered with ornaments. In his hours of inspiration, impulse, ambition, of fruitful and facile execution, these pacings had been a delicious recreation—these goings and comings across the large room, brightened, animated, and warmed by work; but now, in his hours of inefficiency and disgust, the miserable hours, when nothing seemed worth the trouble of an effort or a movement, it was like the terrible tramping of a prisoner in his cell. If only he could have slept, even for an hour, on his divan! But no, he should not sleep; he should only agitate himself until he trembled with exasperation. Whence came this sudden attack of bad temper? He thought: "I am becoming excessively nervous to have worked myself into such a state for so insignificant a cause."

Then he thought he would take a book. The volume of *La Légende des Siècles* had remained on the

iron chair where Annette had laid it. He opened it and read two pages of verse without understanding them. He understood them no more than if they had been written in a foreign tongue. He was determined, however, and began again, only to find that what he read had not really penetrated to his mind. "Well," said he to himself, "I seem to be growing imbecile!" But a sudden inspiration came to him as to how he should fill the two hours that must elapse before dinner-time. He had a hot bath prepared, and there he remained stretched out, relaxed and soothed by the warm water, until his valet, bringing his clothes, roused him from a kind of doze. Then he went to the club, where he found the usual companions. He was received with open arms and exclamations, for they had not seen him for several days.

"I have just returned from the country," he explained.

All those men, except Musadieu, the landscape painter, professed a profound contempt for the country. Rocdiane and Landa, to be sure, went there for shooting, but their sole enjoyment in the meadows and woods was to see pheasants, quail, or partridges falling like handfuls of feathers under their shot, or little rabbits, mortally wounded, turning somersaults like clowns, going heels over head four or five times, showing their white bellies and tails at every bound. Except for this sport in autumn and winter, they thought the country a bore. As Rocdiane would say: "I prefer little women to little peas!"

The dinner was lively and jovial as usual, animated by discussions in which nothing unusual was

said. Bertin, to arouse himself, talked a great deal. They found him amusing, but as soon as he had had coffee, and a sixty-point game of billiards with the banker Liverdy, he went out, strolling from the Madeleine to the Rue Taitbout; after passing three times before the Vaudeville, he asked himself whether he should go in; he almost called a cab to take him to the Hippodrome, changed his mind and turned toward the Nouveau Cirque; then made an abrupt half turn, without motive, design, or pretext, went up the Boulevard Malesherbes again, and walked more slowly as he approached the dwelling of the Comtesse de Guilleroy. "Perhaps she will think it strange to see me again this evening," he thought. But he reassured himself on reflecting that there was nothing astonishing in his coming a second time to inquire how she felt.

She was alone with Annette, in the little back drawing-room, and was still working on her coverlets for the poor.

She said simply, on seeing him enter: "Ah, is it you, my friend?"

"Yes, I felt anxious; I wished to see you. How are you?"

"Thank you, very well."

She paused a moment, then added, significantly: "And you?"

He began to laugh unconcernedly, as he replied: "Oh, I am very well, very well. Your fears were entirely without foundation."

She raised her eyes, pausing in her work, and fixed her gaze upon him, a gaze full of doubt and entreaty.

"It is true," said he.

"So much the better," she replied, with a smile that was slightly forced.

He sat down, and for the first time in that house he was seized with irresistible uneasiness, a sort of paralysis of ideas, still greater than that which had seized him during the day as he sat before his canvas.

"You may go on, my child; it will not annoy him," said the countess to her daughter.

"What was she doing?"

"She was practising a *fantaisie*."

Annette rose to go to the piano. He followed her with his eyes, unconsciously, as he always did, because he thought her pretty. Then he felt the mother's eye upon him, and turned his head abruptly, as if he were looking for something in the dark corner of the drawing-room.

The countess took from her work-table a little gold case that he had given her, opened it, and offered him some cigarettes.

"Pray smoke, my friend," said she; "you know I like it when we are alone here.'

He obeyed, and the music began. It was classical music, graceful and light, one of those compositions that seem to have inspired the artist on a soft moonlight evening in springtime.

"Who is the composer of that?" asked Bertin.

"Schumann," the countess replied. "It is little known and charming."

A desire to look at Annette grew stronger within him, but he did not dare. He would have to make only a slight movement, merely a turn of the neck, for he could see out of the corner of his eye the two candles that lighted the music; but he guessed so

well, read so clearly, the watchful gaze of the countess that he remained motionless, his eyes looking straight before him, interested apparently in the gray thread of smoke from his cigarette.

"Was that all you had to say to me?" Madame de Guilleroy murmured to him.

He smiled.

"Don't be vexed with me. You know that music hypnotizes me; it absorbs my thoughts. I will talk soon."

"I must tell you," said the countess, "that I had studied something for you before mamma's death. I never let you hear it, but I will play it for you immediately, as soon as the little one has finished; you shall see how quaint it is."

She had real talent, and a subtle comprehension of the emotion that flows through sounds. It was indeed one of her surest powers over the painter's sensibility.

As soon as Annette had finished Schumann's pastoral symphony, the countess rose, took her place, and awakened a strange melody with her fingers, a melody of which all the phrases seemed complaints, divers complaints, changing, numerous, interrupted by a single note, beginning again, sounding in the midst of the strains, cutting them short, scanning them, crashing into them, like a monotonous, incessant, persecuting cry, the unappeasable call of an obsession.

But Olivier was looking at Annette, who had sat down facing him, and he heard nothing, comprehended nothing.

He looked at her, without thinking, indulging himself with the sight of her, as a good and habitual

possession of which he had just been deprived, drinking her beauty wholesomely, as we drink water when thirsty.

"Well," said the countess, "was not that beautiful?"

"Admirable! superb!" he said, aroused. "By whom?"

"You do not know it?"

"No."

"What, really, you do not know it?"

"No, indeed."

"By Schubert."

"That does not astonish me at all," he said, with an air of profound conviction. "It is superb! You would be delightful if you would play it over again."

She began once more, and he, turning his head, began again to contemplate Annette, but listened also to the music, that he might taste two pleasures at the same time.

When Madame de Guilleroy returned to her chair, in simple obedience to the natural duplicity of man he did not allow his gaze to rest longer on the fair profile of the young girl, who knitted opposite her mother, on the other side of the lamp.

But, though he did not see her, he tasted the sweetness of her presence, as one feels the proximity of a fire on the hearth; and the desire to cast upon her swift glances only to transfer them immediately to the countess, tormented him—the desire of the schoolboy who climbs up to the window from the street as soon as the master's back is turned.

He went away early, for his power of speech was as paralyzed as his mind, and his persistent silence might be wrongly interpreted.

As soon as he found himself in the street a desire to wander took possession of him, for whenever he heard music it remained in his brain a long time, threw him into reveries that seemed the dream continuation of the music itself, but even more distinct. The melody returned, intermittent and fugitive, bringing separate measures, weakened, and far off like an echo; then, sinking into silence, appeared to leave it to the mind to give a meaning to the themes, and to seek a sort of tender and harmonious ideal. He turned to the left on reaching the outer Boulevard, perceiving the fairylike illumination of the Parc Monceau, and entered its central avenue, curving beneath the electric moons. A policeman was slowly strolling along; now and then a belated cab passed; a man, sitting on a bench in a bluish bath of electric light, was reading a newspaper, at the foot of the bronze mast that bore the dazzling globe. Other lights on the broad lawns, scattered among the trees, shed their cold and powerful rays into the foliage and on the grass, animating with a pale life this great city garden.

Bertin, his hands behind his back, paced the sidewalk, thinking of his walk with Annette in this same park when he had recognized in her the voice of her mother.

He sat down on a bench, and, breathing in the cool freshness of the dewy lawns, he felt himself filled with all the passionate expectancy that transforms the soul of youth into the incoherent canvas of an unfinished love story. Long ago he had known such evenings, those evenings of errant fancy, when he had allowed his caprice to roam through imaginary adventures, and he was astonished to feel a

return of sensations that did not belong to his present age.

But, like the persistent note in the Schubert melody, the thought of Annette, the vision of her face bent beside the lamp, and the strange suspicion of the countess, recurred to him at every instant. He continued, in spite of himself, to occupy his heart with this question, to sound the impenetrable depths where human feelings germinate before they are born. This persistent research agitated him; this absorbing interest in the young girl seemed to open to his soul the way to tender reveries. He could not drive her from his mind; he bore within himself a sort of evocation of her image, as once he had borne the image of the countess after she had left him; he often had the strange sensation of her presence in the studio.

Suddenly, impatient at being dominated by a memory, he rose, muttering: "Any was stupid to say that to me. Now she will make me think of the little one!"

He went home, disturbed about himself. After he had gone to bed he felt that sleep would not come to him, for a fever coursed in his veins, and a desire for reverie fermented in his heart. Dreading a wakeful night, one of those nervous attacks of insomnia brought about by mental disturbance, he thought he would try to read. How many times had reading served him as a narcotic! He got up and went into his library to choose a good and soporific work; but his mind, aroused in spite of himself, eager for any emotion it could find, sought among the shelves for the name of some author that would respond to his state of exaltation and

expectancy. Balzac, whom he loved, said nothing to him; he disdained Hugo, scorned Lamartine, who usually touched his emotions, and fell eagerly upon Musset, the poet of youth. He took a volume and carried it to bed, to read whatever he might chance to find.

When he had settled himself in bed, he began to drink, as with the thirst of a drunkard, those flowing verses of an inspired being who sang, like a bird, of the dawn of existence, and having breath only for the morning, was silent in the arid light of day; those verses of a poet who above all mankind was intoxicated with life, expressing his intoxication in fanfares of frank and triumphant love, the echo of all young hearts bewildered with desires.

Never had Bertin so perfectly comprehended the physical charm of those poems, which move the senses but hardly touch the intelligence. With his eyes on those vibrating stanzas, he felt that his soul was but twenty years old, radiant with hopes, and he read the volume almost through in a state of youthful intoxication. Three o'clock struck, and he was astonished to find that he had not yet grown sleepy. He rose to shut his window and to carry his book to a table in the middle of the room; but at the contact of the cold night air a pain, which several seasons at Aix had not succeeded in removing, ran through his loins, like a warning or a recall; and he threw aside the poet with an impatient movement, muttering: "Old fool!" Then he returned to bed and blew out his light.

He did not go to see the countess the next day, and he even made a heroic resolution not to return there for two days. But whatever he did, whether

he tried to paint or to walk, whether he bore his melancholy mood with him from house to house, his mind was everywhere harassed by the incessant recollection of those two women.

Having forbidden himself to go to see them, he solaced himself by thinking of them, and he allowed both mind and heart to give themselves up to memories of both. It happened often that in that species of hallucination in which he lulled his isolation the two faces approached each other, different, such as he knew them; then, passing one before the other, mingled, blended together, forming only one face, a little confused, a face that was no longer the mother's, not altogether that of the daughter, but the face of a woman he still loved madly, long ago, still loved and would love forever.

The he felt remorse at having abandoned himself to the influence of these emotions, which he knew were powerful and dangerous. To escape them, to drive them away, to deliver his soul from this sweet and captivating dream, he tried to think of everything, of every imaginable possible subject of reflection and meditation. Vain effort! In whatever direction his mind turned it always led him back to the same point, where he met a fair young face that seemed to be lying in wait for him. It was a vague and unavoidable obsession that hung over him and pulled him up short, no matter by what roundabout method he sought to avoid it.

The confusion of these two personalities, which had so troubled him on the evening of their walk at Roncières, rose again in his memory as soon, ceasing to reflect and reason, as he evoked them, and attempted to understand this strange emotion that

stirred his being. He said to himself: "Let's see, have I for Annette a more tender feeling than I should have?" Then, probing his heart, he felt it burning with affection for a woman who was young, who had Annette's features, but who was not she. And he reassured himself in a cowardly way by thinking: "No, I do not love the little one; I am the victim of a resemblance."

However, those two days at Roncières remained in his soul, as a spring of warmth, happiness, intoxication; and the least details of those days returned to him, one by one, with precision, sweeter even than at the time they occurred. Suddenly, while reviewing these memories, he saw once more the road they had followed on leaving the cemetery, the young girl plucking flowers, and he recollected that he had promised her a cornflower in sapphires as soon as they returned to Paris.

All his resolutions took flight, and without struggling longer he took his hat and went out, rejoiced at the thought of the pleasure he was about to give her.

The footman answered him, when he presented himself:

"Madame is out, but mademoiselle is at home."

Again he felt a thrill of joy.

"Tell her that I should like to speak to her."

Annette appeared almost immediately.

"Good-day, dear master," said she gravely.

He began to laugh, shook hands with her, and sitting near her, said:

"Guess why I have come."

She thought a few seconds.

"I don't know."

"To take you and your mother to the jeweler's to choose the sapphire cornflower I promised you at Roncières."

The young girl's face was illumined with delight.

"Oh, and mamma has gone out," said she. "But she will return soon. You will wait for her, won't you?"

"Yes, if she is not too long."

"Oh, I like that! Too long, with me! You treat me like a child."

"No, not as much as you think," he replied.

He felt in his heart a longing to please her, to be gallant and witty, as in the most successful days of his youth, one of those instinctive desires that excite all the faculties of charming, that make the peacock spread its tail and the poet write verses. Witty phrases rose to his lips, and he talked as he knew how to talk when he was at his best. The young girl, animated by his vivacity, answered him with all the mischief and sly humor that were in her.

Suddenly, while they were discussing a subject, he exclaimed: "But you have often told me that before and I have answered you——"

She interrupted him with a burst of laughter.

"Ah, you don't say 'tu' to me any more! You take me for mamma!"

He blushed and was silent. Then he stammered:

"Your mother has already maintained that opinion with me a hundred times."

His eloquence was extinguished. He no longer knew what to say, and he now felt afraid, incomprehensibly afraid, of this little girl.

"Here is mamma," said she.

She had heard the door open in the outer draw-

ing-room, and Olivier, disturbed as if some one had caught him in a fault, explained how he had suddenly bethought him of his promise and had come for them to take them to the jeweler's.

"I have a coupé," said he. "I will sit on the bracket seat."

They set out, and a little later they entered Montara's.

Having passed all his life in the intimacy, observation, study and amid the affection of women, having always occupied his mind with them, having been obliged to sound and discover their tastes, to know the details of dress and fashion as well as they knew them, being familiar with the minute details of their private life, he had arrived at a point that enabled him often to share certain of their sensations, and on entering one of the larger shops where the charming and delicate accessories of their beauty are to be found, he experienced a pleasurable emotion almost equal to that which stirred their enthusiasm. He interested himself as they did in those coquettish trifles with which they set forth their beauty; the materials pleased his eyes; the laces attracted his hands; the most insignificant furbelows held his attention. In jewelers' shops he felt for the showcases a sort of religious respect, and the counter, covered with dark cloth, upon which the supple fingers of the goldsmith turned over the gems to display their brilliant facets, filled him with a certain veneration.

When he had seated the countess and her daughter before this sombre piece of furniture, on which each, with a natural movement, placed one hand, he

mentioned what he wanted, and they showed him models of little flowers.

Then they spread sapphires before him, from which it was necessary to choose four. This took a long time. The two women turned them over on the cloth with the tips of their fingers, then lifted them carefully, looked through them at the light, studying them with the rapt attention of connoisseurs. When they had laid aside those they had chosen, three emeralds had to be selected tomake the leaves, then a tiny diamond that would tremble in the centre like a drop of dew.

Olivier, intoxicated with the joy of giving, said to the countess:

"Will you do me the favor to choose two rings?"

"I?"

"Yes. One for you, one for Annette. Let me make you these little presents in memory of the two days I passed at Roncières."

She refused. He insisted. A long discussion followed, a struggle of words and arguments, in which he triumphed, though not without difficulty.

Rings were brought, some, the rarest, by themselves in special cases; others arranged in similar groups in large square boxes, wherein all the fancifulness of their settings was displayed in alignment on the velvet. The painter was seated between the two women and began, with the same ardent curiosity, to take up the gold rings, one by one, from the narrow slits that held them. He placed them before him on the cloth-covered counter, separating them into two groups, those that had been rejected at first sight and those from which a choice would be made.

Time was passing, insensibly and sweetly, in this

pretty work of selection, more captivating than all the pleasures of amusements, of society, entertaining and varied as a play, stirring also an exquisite and almost sensuous pleasure in a woman's heart.

Then they compared, became animated, and, after some hesitation, the choice of the three judges settled upon a little golden serpent holding a beautiful ruby between his thin jaws and his twisted tail.

Olivier, radiant, now rose to his feet.

"I will leave you my carriage," said he; "I have something to look after, and I must go."

But Annette begged her mother to walk home, as the weather was so fine. The countess consented, and, having thanked Bertin, she went along the street with her daughter.

They walked for some time in silence, happy in the thought of the presents they had received. Then they began to talk of all the jewels they had seen and handled. Within their minds still lingered a sort of glittering and jingling, a sort of delight. They walked quickly through the crowd which fills the streets about five o'clock on a summer evening. Men turned to look at Annette and murmured words of admiration as they passed. It was the first time since her mourning, since mourning had added brilliancy to her daughter's beauty, that the countess had gone out with her in the streets of Paris; and the sensation of that street success, that awakened attention, those whispered compliments, that little wake of flattering emotion which the passing of a pretty woman leaves in a crowd of men, contracted her heart little by little with the same painful feeling she had had the other evening in her drawing-room, when her guests had compared the little one

with her own portrait. In spite of herself, she watched for those glances that Annette attracted; she felt them coming from a distance, pass over her own face without stopping and suddenly settle upon the fair face beside her own. She guessed, she saw in the eyes the rapid and silent homage to this blooming youthfulness, to the powerful charm of that radiant freshness, and she thought: "I was as pretty as she, if not prettier." Suddenly the thought of Olivier flashed across her mind, and she was seized, as at Roncières, with a longing to flee.

She did not wish to feel herself any longer in this bright light, amid this stream of people, seen by all those men who were not looking at her. Those days seemed far away, though in reality quite recent, when she had challenged comparison with her daughter. Who to-day, among the passers-by, thought of comparing them? Only one person had thought of it, perhaps, a little while ago in the jeweler's shop. He? Oh, how she suffered! How could he help this comparison being always present to his mind! He certainly could not see them together without thinking of it!

"I feel ill," said she. "We will take a cab, my child."

Annette was uneasy.

"What is the matter, mamma?" she asked.

"It is nothing. You know that since your grandmother's death I often have these attacks of weakness."

CHAPTER V

A WANING MOON

Fixed ideas have the gnawing persistence of incurable maladies. Once they enter the soul they devour it, leaving it no longer free to think of anything, to take an interest in anything. Whatever she did, or wherever she was, alone or surrounded by friends, the comtesse could no longer rid herself of the thought that had come to her as she walked home beside her daughter. Could Olivier, seeing them together almost every day, help making a comparison between them?

Surely he must do it in spite of himself, incessantly, himself haunted by that unforgetable resemblance, accentuated still further by the similarity of tone and gesture they had lately tried to attain. Every time he entered she thought of that comparison; she read it in his eyes, guessed it and pondered over it in her heart and in her mind. Then she was tortured by a desire to hide herself, to disappear, never to show herself again beside her daughter.

She suffered, too, in all ways, no longer feeling at home in her own house. That pained feeling of dispossession which she had had one evening, when all eyes were fixed on Annette under her portrait, was become more intense, until she sometimes lost patience. She reproached herself unceasingly for feeling that yearning need for deliverance, that unutterable desire to send her daughter away from her, as though she were an embarrassing and tenacious guest; and she worked toward that end with uncon-

scious cleverness, filled once more with the desire of struggling to retain, in spite of everything, the man she loved.

Unable to hasten Annette's marriage too urgently, because of their recent mourning, she feared, with a confused yet dominating fear, anything that might defeat that plan; and she sought, almost in spite of herself, to awaken in her daughter's heart some feeling of tenderness for the marquis.

All the resourceful diplomacy she had employed so long to hold Olivier now took with her a new form, shrewder, more secret, exerting itself to kindle affection between the young people and to keep the two men from meeting.

As the painter, who kept regular hours of work, never breakfasted away from home, and usually gave only his evenings to his friends, she often invited the marquis to breakfast. He would arrive with an atmosphere of enjoyment from his ride, a sort of breath of morning air. Annette was amused in listening to him, acquiring a taste for those topics of the day that he recounted to her, fresh and piquant as they were. An intimacy of youth sprang up between them, a pleasant companionship which a common and passionate love of horses naturally fostered. When he had gone the countess and the count would artfully praise him, saying everything necessary to let the young girl know that it depended only upon herself to marry him if he pleased her.

She understood very quickly, however, and reasoning frankly with herself, judged it a very simple thing to take for a husband this handsome fellow, who would give her, besides other enjoyments, that

which she preferred above all others, the pleasure of galloping beside him every morning on a thoroughbred.

They found themselves betrothed one day, quite naturally, after a clasp of the hand and a smile, and the marriage was spoken of as something long decided. Then the marquis began to bring gifts, and the duchess treated Annette like her own daughter. Thus the whole affair had been fostered by common accord, warmed over the fire of a little intimacy, during the quiet hours of the day; and the marquis, having many other occupations, relatives, obligations and duties, rarely came in the evening.

That was Olivier's time. He dined regularly every week with his friends and also continued to appear without appointment to ask for a cup of tea between ten o'clock and midnight.

As soon as he entered the countess watched him, devoured by a desire to know what was passing in his heart. He gave no glance, made no gesture that she did not immediately interpret, and she was tortured by this thought: "It is impossible that he is not in love with her when he sees us one beside the other."

He, too, brought gifts. Not a week passed that he did not appear bearing two little packages in his hands, offering one to the mother, the other to the daughter; and the countess, opening the boxes, which often held valuable objects, felt again that contraction of the heart. She knew so well that desire to give, which as a woman she never had been able to satisfy—that desire to bring something that would give pleasure, to purchase for some one, to find in the shops some trifle that would please.

The painter had formerly been through this phase, and she had seen him come in many times with that same smile, that same gesture, a little packet in his hand. That habit had ceased after a while, and now it had begun again. For whom? She had no manner of doubt. It was not for her!

He appeared fatigued and thin. She concluded that he was suffering. She compared his entrance, his manner, his bearing with the attitude of the marquis, who was also beginning to be attracted by Annette's grace. It was not at all the same thing: Monsieur de Farandal was smitten, Olivier Bertin loved! She believed this at least during her hours of torture; then, in quieter moments, she still hoped that she had deceived herself.

Oh, often she could hardly restrain herself from questioning him when she was alone with him, praying, entreating him to speak, to confess all, to hide nothing! She preferred to know and to weep in the certainty rather than to suffer thus in doubt, not able to read that closed heart, in which she felt another love was growing.

That heart, which she prized more highly than her life, over which she had watched and which she had warmed and cheered with her love for twelve years, of which she had believed herself sure, which she had hoped was finally hers, conquered, submissive, passionately devoted for the rest of their lives—that heart was escaping her by an inconceivable, horrible and monstrous fatality! Yes, it had suddenly closed, holding a secret. She could no longer penetrate it by a familiar word or hide therein her own affection as in a safe retreat open for herself alone. What is the use of loving, of giving one-

self without reserve, if the one to whom one has offered one's whole being, one's whole existence, all one has in the world, suddenly forsakes you because another face has pleased him, transforming him in a few days almost into a stranger?

A stranger! He, Olivier? He spoke to her, as always, with the same words, the same voice, the same tone. And yet there was something between them, something inexplicable, intangible, insurmountable, almost nothing—that slight nothing that causes a sailboat to float away when the wind turns.

He was drifting, in fact, drifting away from her a little more each day, at every glance he cast upon Annette. He himself did not attempt to see clearly into the depths of his heart. He felt, indeed, that ferment of love, that irresistible attraction; but he did not wish to understand, he trusted to events, to the unforeseen chances of life.

He no longer cared about anything but those dinners and his evenings passed with those two women, separated from the gay world by their mourning. Meeting only indifferent faces at their house—usually those of the Corbelles and Musadieu—he fancied himself almost alone in the world with them; and as he now seldom saw the duchess and the marquis, for whom the morning and noontime were reserved, he wished to forget them, suspecting that the marriage had been indefinitely postponed.

Besides, Annette never spoke of Monsieur de Farandal before him. Was this because of a sort of instinctive modesty, or was it perhaps from one of those secret intuitions of the feminine heart which makes them suspect that of which they are ignorant?

Weeks followed weeks, without changing this

manner of life, and autumn came, bringing the reopening of the Chamber, earlier than usual because of certain political dangers.

On the day of the reopening the Comte de Guilleroy was to take Madame de Mortemain, the marquis and Annette to the meeting of Parliament, after a breakfast at his own house. The countess alone, isolated in her sorrow, which was steadily increasing, had declared that she would remain at home.

They had left the table and were drinking coffee in the large drawing-room in a merry mood. The count, happy to resume parliamentary work, his only pleasure, talked very well on the existing situation and the difficulties of the Republic; the marquis, unmistakably in love, answered him enthusiastically, while gazing at Annette; and the duchess was almost equally pleased at the emotion of her nephew as at the distress of the government. The air of the drawing-room was warm with that first concentrated heat of newly lighted furnaces, the heat of draperies, carpets and walls, in which the perfume of asphyxiated flowers was evaporating. There was in this closely shut room, filled with the aroma of coffee, an air of comfort, intimate, familiar and satisfied, when the door was opened to admit Olivier Bertin.

He paused at the threshold, so surprised that he hesitated to enter. A confusion of anger and mingled emotion suffocated him, revealing to him the fact that he was madly in love! All that they had hidden from him and all that he had concealed from himself was now evident to him as he perceived the marquis installed in the house as a betrothed lover!

He perceived in a transport of anger all that he would rather not have known and all that the coun-

tess had not dared to tell him. He did not ask himself why all those marriage preparations had been concealed from him. He guessed why, and his eyes, with a hard expression, met those of the countess, who blushed. They understood each other.

When he was seated, every one was silent for a few seconds, his unexpected entrance having paralyzed their flow of spirits. Then the duchess began to speak to him, and he replied in a brief manner, his voice suddenly changed.

He looked round at these people who were now chatting again and said to himself: "They are making game of me. They shall pay for it." He was especially vexed with the countess and with Annette, whose innocent dissimulation he suddenly understood.

"Oh, oh! it is time to go," exclaimed the count, looking at the clock. Turning to the painter, he added: "We are going to the opening of Parliament, all except my wife, who will remain here, however. Will you accompany us? It would give me great pleasure."

"No, thank you," replied Olivier dryly. "Your Chamber does not tempt me."

Annette approached in a playful way, saying: "Oh, do come, dear master! I am sure that you would amuse us much more than the deputies."

"No, indeed. You will amuse yourself very well without me."

Seeing him discontented and chagrined, she insisted, to show that she felt kindly toward him.

"Yes, come, Sir Painter! I assure you that as for myself I cannot do without you."

His next words escaped him so quickly that he

could neither check them as he spoke nor soften their tone:

"Bah! You do well enough without me, just as every one else does!"

A little surprised at his tone, she exclaimed: "Come, now! Here he is beginning again to leave off his 'tu' to me!"

His lips were curled in one of those sad smiles that reveal the suffering of a soul, and he said with a slight bow: "I shall have to get used to it some day or other."

"Why, pray?"

"Because you will marry, and your husband, whoever he may be, would be justified in considering that word rather out of place coming from me."

"It will be time enough then to think about that," the countess hastened to say. "But I trust that Annette will not marry a man so susceptible as to object to such familiarity from so old a friend."

"Come, come!" cried the count; "let us go. We shall be late."

Those who were to accompany him having risen, went out with him, after the usual handshakes and kisses which the duchess, the countess and her daughter exchanged at every meeting as at every parting.

They remained alone, She and He, standing behind the draperies of the closed door.

"Sit down, my friend," said she softly.

But he answered almost roughly: "No, thanks! I am going, too."

"Oh, why?" she murmured entreatingly.

"Because this is not my hour, it appears. I ask pardon for having come without warning."

"Olivier, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I only regret having disturbed a prearranged pleasure party."

She seized his hand.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "They were just about to set out, since they were going to be present at the opening of the session. I intended to stay at home. Contrary to what you said just now, you were really inspired in coming to-day when I am alone."

He sneered.

"Inspired? Yes, I was inspired!"

She seized his wrists, and looking deep into his eyes, she murmured very low:

"Confess to me that you love her!"

He withdrew his hands, unable to control his impatience any longer.

"Why, you are simply insane with that idea!"

She seized him again by the arm and, tightening her hold on his sleeve, she implored:

"Olivier! Confess, confess! I would rather know. I am certain of it, but I would rather know. I would rather—oh, you do not comprehend what my life has become!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have me do? Is it my fault if you lose your head?"

She held him, drawing him toward the other salon at the back, where they would not be heard. She drew him by his coat, clinging to him, out of breath. When she had led him as far as the little circular divan, she made him sit down and sat down beside him.

"Olivier, my friend, my only friend, I pray you to tell me that you love her. I know it, I feel it

from all that you do. I cannot doubt it. It is killing me, but I wish to know it from your own lips."

As he still demurred, she fell on her knees at his feet. Her voice shook.

"Oh, my friend, my only friend! Is it true that you love her?"

"No, no, no!" he exclaimed, as he tried to make her rise. "I swear to you that I do not."

She reached up her hand to his mouth and pressed it there tight, stammering: "Oh, do not lie! I suffer too much!"

Then, letting her head fall on this man's knees, she sobbed.

He could see only the back of her neck, a mass of blond hair, mingled with many white threads, and he was filled with immense pity, immense grief.

Seizing that heavy hair in both hands, he raised her head violently, turning toward himself two bewildered eyes, from which tears were flowing. And then he pressed repeated kisses on those tearful eyes as he said:

"Any! Any! my dear, dear Any!"

She attempted to smile, and speaking in the hesitating voice of children when choking with tears, said:

"Oh, my friend, only tell me that you still love me a little."

He kissed her again.

"Yes, I love you, my dear Any."

She rose, sat down beside him again, seized his hands, looked at him and said tenderly:

"We have known each other so long. It should not end like this."

He pressed her close to him, asking:

"Why should it end?"

"Because I am old and because Annette is too much like what I was when you first knew me."

Now it was his turn to close her sad lips with his fingers, saying:

"Again! Please do not mention it again. I swear to you that you are mistaken."

"Oh, if you will only love me a little," she repeated.

"Yes, I love you," he said again.

They remained silent for some minutes, their hands clasped, deeply moved and very sad. At last she broke the silence, murmuring:

"Oh, the years that remain to me will not be cheerful!"

"I will try to make them sweet to you."

The shadow of those cloudy skies that precedes the twilight by two hours was darkening the drawing-room, burying them little by little in the gray dimness of an autumn evening.

The clock struck.

"We have been in here some time," said she. "You must go, for some one might come in, and we are not calm."

He rose, clasped her close, kissing her half-open lips as he used to do. Then they crossed the two drawing-rooms, arm in arm, like a married pair.

"Good-by, my friend."

"Good-by, my friend."

And the portière fell behind him.

He went downstairs, turned toward the Madeleine and began to walk without knowing what he was doing, dazed as if from a blow, his legs weak, his heart hot and palpitating as if something burn-

ing shook within his breast. For two or three hours, perhaps four, he walked straight before him, in a sort of moral stupor and physical prostration which left him only just strength enough to put one foot before the other. Then he went home to reflect.

He did love this little girl, then. He understood now his feelings when he was by her side, ever since that walk in the Parc Monceau, when he recognized in her voice the tone of a voice he scarcely remembered; the voice that long ago had awakened his heart; then all that slow, irresistible renewal of a love not yet extinct, not yet cold, which he persisted in not acknowledging to himself.

What should he do? What could he do? When she was married he would avoid seeing her often, that was all. Meantime he would continue to return to the house, so that no one should suspect anything, and he would hide his secret from every one.

He dined at home, which he very seldom did. Then he had a fire made in the large stove in his studio, for the night promised to be very cold. He even ordered the chandeliers to be lighted, as if he disliked the dark corners, and then he shut himself in. What strange emotion, profound, physical, frightfully sad, had seized him? He felt it in his throat, in his breast, in all his relaxed muscles as well as in his fainting soul. The walls of the apartment oppressed him; all his life was enclosed therein —his life as an artist, his life as a man. Every painted study hanging there recalled a success, each piece of furniture spoke of some memory. But successes and memories were things of the past! His life? How short, how empty yet full it seemed to him. He had made pictures, and more pictures, and

always pictures, and had loved one woman. He recalled his evenings, after their meetings, in this same studio. He had walked whole nights with his being on fire with fever. The joy of happy love, the joy of worldly success, the unique intoxication of glory had caused him to taste ever to be remembered hours of inward triumph.

He had loved a woman, and that woman had loved him. Through her he had received that baptism which reveals to man the mysterious world of emotion and of love. She had taken his heart almost by storm, and now he could no longer close it. Another love had entered, in spite of him, through this opening—another, or rather the same, relighted by a new face; the same, only stronger by virtue of the need of worshipping something that grows with our years. So he loved this little girl! He need no longer struggle, resist or deny; he loved her with the despairing knowledge that he would not even obtain a little pity from her, that she would always be ignorant of his terrible torment, and that another would marry her! At this thought, constantly recurring, impossible to drive away, he was seized with an animal-like desire to howl like chained dogs, for like them he felt powerless, enslaved, imprisoned. Becoming more and more nervous the longer he reflected, he strode up and down the large room, lighted up as if for a celebration. At last, unable to tolerate longer the pain of that reopened wound, he sought to try and calm it with the recollection of his early love, to drown it in the recollection of his first and great passion. From the wall closet, where he kept it, he took the copy of the countess' portrait that he had formerly made for himself. Then he put it

on his easel, and sitting down in front of it, gazed at it. He tried to recall her, to see her alive again, just as she was when he first loved her. But it was always Annette that rose upon the canvas. The mother had disappeared, vanished, leaving in her place that other face which resembled hers so strangely. It was the little one, with her hair a little lighter, her smile a little more roguish, her air a little more mocking, and he felt that he belonged body and soul to that young being, as he never had belonged to the other, as a sinking vessel belongs to the waves!

Then he arose, and in order that he might not see this apparition any longer he turned the painting to the wall. Then, as he felt overwhelmed with sadness, he went to his bedroom, to the drawer of his desk, in which were sleeping all the letters of his loved one. There they lay, as if in a bed, one upon another, forming a thick layer of little thin papers. He thrust his hands among the mass; he looked at that narrow board coffin in which lay the piled-up envelopes on which his name, his name alone, was always written. He reflected that the love, the tender attachment of two beings, one for the other, were recounted therein, among that yellowing mass of papers with red seals, and he inhaled, in bending over them, the old melancholy odor of letters that have been packed away.

He wished to reread them, and feeling in the bottom of the drawer, he drew out a handful of the earlier ones. As soon as he opened them vivid memories emerged from them, which stirred his soul. He recognized many that he had carried about on his person for whole weeks and found again,

throughout the delicate handwriting that said such sweet things to him, the forgotten emotions of early days. Suddenly he found under his fingers a fine embroidered handkerchief. What was that? He pondered a few minutes, then he remembered! One day, at his house, she had wept because she was a little jealous, and he had stolen and kept her handkerchief, moist with her tears!

Ah, what sad things! What sad things! The poor woman!

From the depths of that drawer, from the depths of his past, all these reminiscences rose like a vapor, but it was only the impalpable vapor of a dead past. Nevertheless he suffered and wept over the letters, as one weeps over the dead because they are no more.

But the remembrance of all his early love awakened in him a new and youthful ardor, a wave of irresistible tenderness which called up in his mind the radiant face of Annette. He had loved the mother through a passionate impulse of voluntary servitude; he was beginning to love this little girl like a slave, a trembling old slave on whom fetters are riveted that he never can break. He felt this in the depths of his being, and was terrified. He tried to understand how and why she had thus taken possession of him. He knew her so little! She was hardly a woman as yet; her heart and soul still slept with the sleep of youth.

He, on the other hand, was now almost at the end of his life. How, then, had this child been able to capture him with a few smiles and locks of hair? Ah, the smiles, the hair of that little blonde maiden made him long to fall on his knees and prostrate his forehead on the ground!

Does one know, does one ever know why a woman's face has suddenly the power of poison upon us? It seems as if one had been drinking her with one's eyes, that she had become one's mind and body. We are intoxicated with her, mad over her; we live in that absorbed image and would willingly die of it!

How one suffers sometimes from this terrible, incomprehensibe power of a certain face on a man's heart!

Olivier Bertin began to pace his room again; night was advancing, his fire had gone out. Through the window-panes the cold air penetrated from outside. Then he went back to bed, where he continued to think and suffer until daylight.

He rose early, without knowing why, nor what he was going to do, his nerves unstrung, irresolute as a whirling weather-vane.

In seeking some distraction for his mind, some occupation for his body, he recollected that on that particular day of the week certain members of his club had the habit of meeting regularly at the Moorish Baths, where they breakfasted after the massage. So he dressed quickly, hoping that the hot room and the shower would calm him, and went out.

As soon as he reached the street he felt a chill, that first biting cold of the early frost, which destroys in a single night the last traces of summer.

All along the boulevards fell a thick shower of large yellow leaves which rustled down with a dry sound. The road and the sidewalks were already covered with them, resembling for a few hours the paths in the woods at the beginning of winter. All that dead foliage crackled under the feet and massed

itself, from time to time, in light waves under the gusts of wind.

This was one of those days of transition which mark the end of one season and the beginning of another, which fill us with joy or with a certain sadness—sadness at the death of the summer or joy at the rising of the sap.

In crossing the threshold of the Moorish Baths the thought of the warmth that would soon penetrate him after his walk in the cold air made Olivier's sad heart thrill with satisfaction.

He undressed quickly, wrapping round his body the light scarf the attendant handed to him, and disappeared behind the padded door open before him.

A warm, oppressive breath, which seemed to come from a distant furnace, made him gasp as he crossed a Moorish gallery lighted by two Oriental lanterns. Then a negro with woolly head, with shining body and muscular limbs, attired only in a girdle, ran before him to raise a curtain at the other end; and Bertin entered the large hot-air room, round, high-studded, silent, almost as mystic as a temple. Daylight fell from above through a cupola and through trefoils of colored glass into the immense circular room, with paved floor and walls covered with porcelain decorated with Moorish designs.

Men of all ages, almost naked, walked slowly about, grave and silent; others were seated on marble benches, with arms crossed; others still chatted in low tones.

The burning air made one gasp at the very entrance. There was something antique and mysterious in that stifling and decorated circular room,

where human flesh was heated, where black and yellow attendants with copper-colored legs moved about.

The first face the painter saw was that of the Comte de Landa. He was promenading around like a Roman wrestler, proud of his enormous chest and of his great arms crossed over it. A frequenter of the hot baths, he felt like an admired actor on the stage and he criticised as an expert the muscles of all the strong men in Paris.

"Good-morning, Bertin," said he.

They shook hands. Then Landa continued: "Splendid weather for sweating!"

"Yes, magnificent."

"Have you seen Rocdiane? He is down there. I was at his house just as he was getting out of bed. Oh, look at that anatomy!"

A little gentleman was passing, bow-legged, with thin arms and flanks, the sight of whom caused the two old models of human vigor to smile disdainfully.

Rocdiane approached them, having perceived the painter. They sat down on a long marble table and began to chat quite as if they were in a drawing-room. The attendants moved about, offering drinks. One could hear the clapping of the masseurs' hands on bare flesh and the sudden flow of the shower-baths. A continuous pattering of water, coming from all corners of the great amphitheater, filled it also with a sound like rain.

At every instant some newcomer saluted the three friends or approached them to shake hands. Among them were the big Duc d'Harisson, the little Prince Epilati, Baron Flach and others.

Suddenly Rocdiane said: "How are you, Farandal?"

The marquis entered, his hands on his hips, with the easy air of well-made men, who never feel embarrassed at anything.

"He is a gladiator, that chap!" Landa murmured.

Rocdiane resumed, turning toward Bertin: "Is it true that he is to marry the daughter of your friend?"

"I think so," said the painter.

But such a question, before that man, in that place, caused Olivier's heart to throb with despair and rebellion. The horror of all the realities he had foreseen appeared to him for a second with such acuteness that he struggled an instant or so against an animal-like desire to fling himself on Farandal.

He arose.

"I am tired," said he. "I am going to the massage now."

An Arab was passing.

"Ahmed, are you at liberty?"

"Yes, Monsieur Bertin."

And he went away quickly, in order to avoid shaking hands with Farandal, who was approaching slowly as he walked round the Hammam.

He remained barely a quarter of an hour in the large, quiet resting-room, in his circle of alcoves with their beds enclosing a flower bed of African plants with a little fountain in the centre. He had a feeling of being pursued, menaced, as if the marquis were about to join him, and that he should be compelled, with extended hand, to treat him as a friend when he longed to kill him.

He soon found himself again on the Boulevard, covered with dead leaves. They had ceased to fall, the last having been detached by a long gust of wind.

Suddenly a sort of roaring noise glided over the roofs, the animal-like sound of a rising storm and at the same time a furious gust of wind that seemed to come from the Madeleine swept through the Boulevard.

All the fallen leaves, which appeared to have been waiting for it, rose at his approach. They ran before it, massing themselves, whirling and rising in spirals up to the tops of the buildings. The wind chased them like a flock, a mad flock that fled before it, flying toward the gates of Paris and the free sky of the suburbs. And when the great cloud of leaves and dust had disappeared on the heights of the Quartier Malesherbes, the sidewalks and roads remained bare, strangely clean and swept.

Bertin was thinking: "What will become of me? What shall I do? Where shall I go?" And he returned home, unable to think of anything.

A news-stand attracted his eye. He bought seven or eight newspapers, hoping that he might find in them something to read for an hour or two.

"I will breakfast here," he said as he entered and went up to his studio.

But as he sat down he felt that he could not stay there, for throughout his body surged the excitement of an angry beast.

The newspapers, which he glanced through, could not distract his mind for a minute, and the news he read met his eye without reaching his brain. In the midst of an article which he was not trying to comprehend the name of Guilleroy made him start. It was about the session of the Chamber, where the count had spoken a few words.

His attention, aroused by that item, was now at-

tracted by the name of the celebrated tenor Montrosé, who was to give, about the end of December, a single performance at the Opera. This would, the newspapers stated, be a magnificent musical solemnity, for the tenor Montrosé, who had been absent six years from Paris, had just won, throughout Europe and America, a success without precedent; moreover, he would be supported by the illustrious Swedish singer, Helsson, who had not been heard in Paris for five years.

Suddenly Olivier had an idea, which seemed to spring from the depths of his heart—he would give Annette the pleasure of seeing this performance. Then he remembered that the countess' mourning might be an obstacle to this scheme, and he sought some way to put it in execution in spite of the difficulty. Only one method presented itself. He must take a stage-box where one may be almost invisible, and if the countess should still not wish to go, he would have her father and the duchess accompany Annette. In that case he would have to offer his box to the duchess. But then he would be obliged to invite the marquis!

He hesitated and reflected a long time.

The marriage was certainly decided upon; no doubt the date was settled. He guessed the reason for his friend's haste in having it settled; he understood that in the shortest time possible she would give her daughter to Farandal. He could not help it. He could neither prevent, nor modify, nor delay this frightful thing. Since he must bear it, would it not be better for him to try to master his feelings, hide his suffering, appear pleased, and no longer al-

low himself to be carried away by his rage, as he had done?

Yes, he would invite the marquis, and so allay the countess' suspicions, and keep a friendly door open in the new establishment.

As soon as he had breakfasted he went down to the Opera to engage one of the boxes hidden by the curtain. It was promised to him. Then he hastened to the Guilleroys'.

The countess appeared almost immediately, apparently still a little moved by their interview of the day before.

"How kind of you to come again to-day!" said she.

"I am bringing you something," he faltered.

"What is it?"

"A stage-box at the Opera for the single performance of Helsson and Montrosé."

"Oh, my friend, what a pity! And my mourning?"

"Your mourning has lasted for almost four months."

"I assure you that I cannot."

"And Annette? Remember that she may never have such an opportunity again."

"With whom could she go?"

"With her father and the duchess, whom I am about to invite. I intend also to offer a seat to the marquis."

She gazed into his eyes and a wild desire to kiss him rose to her lips. Hardly believing her ears, she repeated: "To the marquis?"

"Why, yes."

She consented at once to this arrangement.

He continued in an indifferent tone: "Have you fixed the date of their marriage?"

"Oh, yes, almost. We have reasons for hastening it very much, more particularly as it was decided upon before my mother's death. You remember that?"

"Yes, perfectly. And when will it take place?"

"About the beginning of January. I ask your pardon for not having told you of it sooner."

Annette entered. He felt his heart leap within him, and all the tenderness that drew him toward her suddenly became bitter, arousing in his heart that strange, passionate animosity into which love changes when lashed by jealousy.

"I have brought you something," he said.

"So we have decided to say 'you'?" she replied.

He assumed a paternal tone.

"Listen, my child; I know all about the event that is soon to occur. I assure you that then it will be unavoidable. I may as well say 'you' now as later."

She shrugged her shoulders with an air of annoyance, while the countess remained silent, looking afar off, her thoughts preoccupied.

"Well, what have you brought me?" inquired Annette.

He told her about the performance and the invitations he intended to give. She was delighted, and, throwing her arms round his neck like a little girl, she kissed him on both cheeks.

He felt ready to sink, and understood, when he felt the light caresses of that little mouth with its sweet breath, that he never should be cured of his passion.

The countess, annoyed, said to her daughter: "You know that your father is waiting for you."

"Yes, mamma, I am going."

She ran away, still throwing kisses from the tips of her fingers.

As soon as she had gone Olivier asked: "Will they travel?"

"Yes, for three months."

"So much the better," he murmured in spite of himself.

"But do not neglect me meanwhile."

"No, my friend."

The impulse he had shown the evening before, when seeing her weep, and the intention which he had just expressed of inviting the marquis to the performance at the Opéra had given new hope to the countess.

But it was of short duration. A week had not passed ere she was again watching every stage of his suffering by the expression of his face. She could ignore nothing, herself enduring all the pain that she guessed at in him; and Annette's constant presence reminded her at every moment of the day of the hopelessness of her efforts.

Once, like every one else, she had some notion of the passing years and of the changes they bring. Like every one else, she had said to herself every winter, every spring, and every summer, "I have changed very much since last year." But, always beautiful, though with a changing beauty, she was never uneasy about it. Now, however, suddenly, instead of admitting peacefully the slow march of the seasons, she had just discovered and understood the formidable flight of the minutes. She had had a sudden revelation of the gliding away of the hour, of that imperceptible flight, maddening when we think of it—of that infinite defile of little hurrying

seconds, which nibble at the body and the life of men.

After passing miserable nights, she had long periods of drowsiness that made her more tranquil, as she lay in the warmth of her bed, when her maid drew back the curtains and lighted the morning fire. She lay there tired, drowsy, neither awake nor asleep, in the torpor of thought which revived within her that instinctive and providential hope which gives light and life to the hearts of men up to their last day.

Every morning now, as soon as she rose from her bed, she felt moved by a strong desire to pray to God, to obtain from Him a little relief and consolation.

She would kneel before a large oaken crucifix, a gift from Olivier, a rare treasure he had discovered; and, with lips closed, but imploring with that voice of the soul with which we speak to ourselves, she made her sorrowful supplication to the Divine martyr. Distracted by the need of being heard and succored, naïve in her distress, as are all the faithful ones when they pray, she could not doubt that He heard her, that He was attentive to her request, and was perhaps touched at her grief. She did not ask Him to do for her that which He never had done for any one—to leave her until death all her charm, her freshness and grace; she begged only a little repose, a little respite. She must grow old, of course, just as she must die. But why so soon? Some women remain beautiful so long! Could He not grant that she should be one of these? How good He would be, He who had also suffered so much, if only He would let her keep for two or three

years still the little charm she needed in order to be pleasing!

She did not say these things to Him, of course, but she sighed them forth, in the confused plaint of her being.

Then, having risen, she would sit before her toilet-table, and with a tension of thought as intense as while praying, she would handle the powders, the cold cream, the pencils, the puffs and brushes, which gave her once more the beauty of a plaster cast, fragile, lasting only for a day.

CHAPTER VI

THE ASHES OF LOVE

On the Boulevard two names were heard from all lips: "Emma Helsson" and "Montrosé." The nearer one approached the opera house the oftener one heard those names repeated. Immense posters, too, affixed to the Morris columns, announced them to the passers-by, and in the evening air could be felt the excitement of an approaching event.

That ponderous monument called the National Academy of Music, squatted under the black sky, exhibited to the crowd before its doors the pompous, whitish façade and the marble colonnade of its balcony, illuminated like a stage setting by invisible electric lights.

In the square the mounted Republican guards directed the movement of the crowds, and the innumerable carriages coming from all parts of Paris

allowed one to catch glimpses of creamy light stuff and fair faces behind their lowered windows.

The coupés and landaus formed in line under the reserved arcades, and stopped for a moment, and from them alighted fashionable and other women, in their opera-cloaks, trimmed with fur, feathers, and rare laces—beautiful bodies, divinely dressed!

The whole length of the celebrated stairway was a sort of fairy ascent, an uninterrupted mounting of ladies dressed like queens, whose throats and ears flashed sparkling rays from their diamonds, and whose long trains swept the stairs.

The theater was filling early, for no one wished to lose a note of the two illustrious artists; and throughout the vast amphitheater, under the dazzling electric light from the great chandelier, a throng of people were seating themselves amid an uproar of voices.

From the stage-box, already occupied by the duchess, Annette, the count, the marquis, Bertin and Musadieu, one could see nothing but the wings, where men were talking, running about, and shouting, machinists in blouses, gentlemen in evening dress, actors in costume. But behind the great curtain one heard the deep sound of the crowd, one felt the presence of a mass of moving, over-excited beings, whose agitation seemed to penetrate the curtain, and to extend even to the decorations.

They were about to present *Faust*.

Musadieu was relating anecdotes about the first representations of this work at the Théâtre Lyrique; of its half success in the beginning, followed by brilliant triumph; of the original cast, and their manner of singing each aria. Annette, half turned

toward him, listened with that eager, youthful curiosity with which she regarded the whole world; and at times she cast a tender glance at her fiancé, who in a few days would be her husband. She loved him now as innocent hearts love; that is to say, she loved in him all the hopes she had for the future. The intoxication of the first enjoyments of life, and the ardent longing to be happy, made her tremble with joy and expectation.

And Olivier, who saw all and who knew all, who had sounded all the depths of secret, helpless and jealous love, down to the furnace of human suffering, where the heart seems to crackle like flesh over live coals, stood in the back of the box looking at them with eyes that betrayed his torture.

The three blows were struck, and suddenly the sharp little tap of the baton on the leader's desk put a sudden stop to all movement, all coughing and whispering. Then, after a brief and profound silence, the first measure of the overture arose, filling the house with the invisible and irresistible mystery of music that penetrates our bodies, thrills our nerves and souls with a poetic and sensuous fever, blending with the limpid air we breathe a wave of sound to which we listen.

Olivier took a seat at the back of the box, painfully affected, as if the wounds of his heart had been touched by those accents. But when the curtain rose he stood up again and saw Doctor Faust lost in meditation seated in his alchemist's laboratory.

He had already heard the opera twenty times, and almost knew it by heart, and his attention soon wandered from the stage to the audience. He could see only a small part of it behind the frame of the

stage which concealed their box, but the angle that was visible, extending from the orchestra to the top gallery, showed him a portion of the audience, among whom he recognized many faces. In the orchestra rows the men in white cravats, sitting side by side, seemed a museum of familiar countenances, society men, aritsts, journalists, the whole category of those who never fail to go where every one else goes. In the balcony and in the boxes he noted and named to himself the women he recognized. The Comtesse de Lochrist, in a proscenium box, was absolutely ravishing, while a little farther on a bride, the Marquise d'Ebelin, was already looking through her lorgnette. "That is a pretty beginning," said Bertin to himself.

The audience listened with deep attention and evident sympathy to the tenor Montrosé, who was lamenting over his life.

Olivier thought: "What a farce! There is Faust, the mysterious and sublime Faust who sings the horrible disgust and nothingness of everything; and this crowd are asking themselves anxiously whether Montrosé's voice has not changed!" Then he listened like the others, and behind the trivial words of the libretto, through that music which awakens profound feeling in the soul, he had a sort of revelation as to how Goethe had been able to conceive the heart of Faust.

He had read the poem some time before, and thought it very beautiful without being moved by it, but now he suddenly realized its unfathomable depth, for it seemed to him that on that evening he himself had become a Faust.

Leaning lightly upon the railing of the box, An-

nette was listening with all her ears; and murmurs of satisfaction were beginning to be heard from the audience, for Montrosé's voice was better and richer than ever!

Bertin had closed his eyes. For a whole month, all that he had seen, all that he had felt, everything that he had encountered in life he had immediately transformed into a sort of accessory to his passion. He cast the world and himself as fuel to this fixed idea. All that he saw that was beautiful or rare, all the delightful things he thought of he mentally offered to his little friend; and he had no longer an idea that he did not in some way connect with his love.

Now he listened from the depths of his soul to the echo of Faust's lamentations, and the desire to die surged up within him, the desire to have done with all his grief, with all the misery of his hopeless love. He looked at Annette's delicate profile, and saw the Marquis de Farandal seated behind her also looking at it. He felt old, lost, despairing. Ah, to no longer have any expectation, any hope, not even the right to desire her, to feel himself turned away in the evening of life, like a superannuated functionary whose career is ended—what intolerable torture!

Applause burst forth; Montrosé had triumphed already. And Labarrière as Mephistopheles rose up from the ground.

Olivier, who never had heard him in this *rôle,* listened with renewed attention. The remembrance of Aubin, so dramatic with his bass voice, then of Faure, so seductive with his baritone, distracted his attention for a few moments.

But suddenly a phrase sung by Montrosé with

irresistible power stirred him to the heart. Faust was saying to Satan:

"Je veux un trésor qui les contient tous—
Je veux la jeunesse."

And the tenor appeared in silken doublet, a sword by his side, a plumed cap on his head, elegant, young and handsome, with the affectations of a handsome singer.

A murmur arose. He was very attractive and the women were pleased with him. But Olivier felt some disappointment, for the vivid apparition of Goethe's dramatic poem disappeared in this metamorphosis. Thenceforth he saw before him only a fairy spectacle, filled with pretty little songs, and actors of talent whose voices alone were all he listened to. That man in a doublet, that pretty youth with his roulades, who showed off his thighs and his voice, displeased him. This was not the real, irresistible and sinister Chevalier Faust, who was about to seduce the fair Marguerite.

He sat down again, and the phrase he had just heard returned to his mind:

"I would have a treasure that embraces all—Youth!"

He murmured it beneath his breath, sang it sadly in the depths of his soul, and, with eyes still fixed on Annette's blond head, which rose in the square opening of the box, he felt all the bitterness of that desire that never could be realized.

But Montrosé had just finished the first act with such perfection that enthusiasm broke forth. For several minutes the noise of clapping, stamping and

bravos swept like a storm through the theatre. In all the boxes the women clapped their gloved hands, while the men standing behind them shouted as they applauded.

The curtain fell, but it was raised twice before the applause subsided. Then, when it fell for the third time, separating the stage and the interior boxes from the audience, the duchess and Annette continued their applause a few moments, and were specially thanked by a discreet bow from the tenor.

"Oh, he saw us!" said Annette.

"What an admirable artist!" said the duchess.

And Bertin, who had been leaning over, looked with a mingled feeling of irritation and disdain at the admired actor as he disappeared between two wings, waddling a little, his legs stiff, one hand on his hip, in the affected pose of a theatrical hero.

They began to talk of him. His social successes had made him as famous as his talent. Musadieu related, in veiled language because of Annette's presence, details of the life of this handsome singer, and the duchess, quite carried away, understood and approved all the affairs in which he had been involved and concluded, laughing: "And how could any one resist that voice!"

Olivier felt angry and bitter. He did not understand how any one could really care for a mere actor, for that perpetual personification of human types which never resembled himself; that nocturnal and painted manikin who plays all his characters at so much a night.

"You are jealous of them!" said the duchess. "You men of the world and artists all have a grudge against actors because they are more successful than

you." Turning to Annette, she added: "Come, little one, you who are entering life and look at it with sane eyes, what do you think of this tenor?"

"I think he is very good indeed," Annette replied, with an air of conviction.

The three strokes sounded for the second act, and the curtain rose on the Kermesse.

Helsson's rendering of the part was superb. She seemed to have more voice than formerly, and to have acquired more certainty of method. She had, indeed, become the great, excellent, exquisite singer, whose worldly fame equalled that of Bismarck or De Lesseps.

When Faust rushed toward her, when he sang in his bewitching voice that phrase so full of charm:

"Ne permettrez-vous pas, ma belle demoiselle,
Qu'on vous offre le bras, por faire le chemin?"

And when the pretty blonde Marguerite replied so touchingly:

"Non, monsieur, je ne suis demoiselle ni belle,
Et je n'ai pas besoin qu'on me donne la main,"

the whole house was moved with a thrill of pleasure.

When the curtain fell the applause was tremendous, and Annette applauded so long that Bertin wished to seize her hands to make her stop. His heart was stung by a new torment. He did not speak between the acts, for his fixed thought, now become absolute hatred, was following into his dressing room the odious singer who was thus affecting this child.

Then the curtain rose on the garden scene. Immediately a sort of fever of love seemed to spread through the house, for never had that music, which seems like the breath of kisses, been rendered by two such interpreters. It was no longer two illustrious actors, Montrosé and Helsson; they became two beings from the ideal world, hardly two beings, indeed, but two voices: the eternal voice of the man that loves, the eternal voice of the woman that yields; and together they sighed forth all the poetry of human tenderness.

When Faust sang:

"Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage,"

in the notes that soared from his mouth there was such an accent of adoration, of transport and supplication that for a moment a desire to love filled every heart.

Olivier remembered that he had murmured that phrase himself in the park at Roncières, under the castle windows.

Until then he had thought it rather ordinary; but now it rose to his lips like a last cry of passion, a last prayer, the last hope and the last favor he might expect in this life.

Then he listened no more, heard nothing more. A sharp pang of jealousy tore his heart, for he had just seen Annette carry her handkerchief to her eyes.

She wept! Then her heart was awakening, becoming animated and moved, her little woman's heart which as yet knew nothing! There, quite close to him, without giving him a thought, she had

a revelation of the way in which love may overwhelm a human being; and this revelation, this initiation had come to her from that miserable strolling singer!

Ah, he felt very little anger now toward the Marquis de Farandal, that stupid creature who saw nothing, who did not know, did not understand! But how he execrated that man in tights, who was awakening the soul of that young girl!

He longed to throw himself upon her, as one throws himself upon a person in danger of being run over by a fractious horse, to seize her by the arm, and drag her away, and say to her: "Let us go! let us go! I entreat you!"

How she listened, how she vibrated! And how he suffered. He had suffered thus before, but less cruelly. He remembered it, for the stings of jealousy smart afresh like reopened wounds. He had first felt it at Roncières, in returning from the cemetery, when he felt for the first time that she was escaping from him, that he could not control her, that young girl as independent as a young animal. But down there, when she had irritated him by leaving him to pluck flowers, he had experienced chiefly a brutal desire to check her playful flights, to compel her person to remain beside him; to-day it was her fleeting, intangible soul that was escaping. Ah, that gnawing irritation which he had just recognized, how often he had experienced it in the indescribable little wounds which seem to be always bruising a loving heart. He recalled all the painful impressions of petty jealousy that he had endured, in little stings, day after day. Every time that she had remarked, admired, liked, desired something, he

had been jealous of it; jealous in an imperceptible but continuous fashion, jealous of all that absorbed the time, the looks, the attention, the gaiety, the astonishment or affection of Annette, for all that took a little of her away from him. He had been jealous of all that she did without him, of all that he did not know, of her going about, her reading, of everything that seemed to please her, jealous even of a heroic officer wounded in Africa, of whom Paris talked for a week, of the author of a much praised romance, of a young unknown poet she never had seen, but whose verses Musadieu had recited; in short, of all men that any one praised before her, even carelessly, for when one loves a woman one cannot tolerate without anguish that she should even think of another with an appearance of interest. In one's heart is the imperious need of being the only one in the world in her eyes. One wishes her to see, to know, to appreciate no one else. So soon as she appears to be turning to look at or to recognize some one else, one places himself before her, and unless one can turn aside or absorb her whole interest he suffers to the bottom of his heart.

Olivier suffered thus in the presence of this singer, who seemed to scatter and to gather love in that opera house, and he felt vexed with every one because of the tenor's triumph, with the women whom he saw applauding him from their boxes, with the men, those idiots who were giving a sort of apotheosis to that coxcomb!

An artist! they called him an artist, a great artist! And he had successes, this paid actor, interpreter of another's thought, such as no creator had ever known! Ah, that was like the justice and the

intelligence of the fashionable world, those ignorant and pretentious amateurs for whom the masters of human art work until death. He looked at them, applauding, shouting, going into ecstasies; and the old hostility that had always seethed at the bottom of his proud heart of a *parvenu* became a furious anger against those imbeciles, all powerful only by right of birth and wealth.

Until the end of the performance he remained silent, a prey to thought; then when the storm of enthusiasm had at last subsided he offered his arm to the duchess, while the marquis took Annette's. They descended the grand stairway again, in the midst of a stream of men and women, in a sort of slow and magnificent cascade of bare shoulders, sumptuous gowns and black coats. Then the duchess, the young girl, her father and the marquis entered the same landau, and Olivier Bertin remained alone with Musadieu in the Place de l'Opéra.

Suddenly he felt a sort of affection for this man, or rather that natural attraction for a fellow-countryman one meets in a distant land, for he now felt lost in that strange, indifferent crowd, whereas with Musadieu he might still speak of her.

So he took his arm.

"You are not going home now?" said he. "It is a fine night; let us take a walk."

"Willingly."

They went toward the Madeleine, in the midst of the nocturnal crowd possessed by that brief and violent midnight excitement which stirs the Boulevards when the audiences leave the theatres.

Musadieu had a thousand things in his mind, all his subjects for conversation from the moment when

Bertin should name his preference; and he let his eloquence loose upon the two or three topics that interested him most. The painter allowed him to run on without listening to him, and holding him by the arm, sure of being able soon to lead him to talk of Annette, he walked along without noticing his surroundings, walled in by his love. He walked, exhausted by that fit of jealousy which had bruised him like a fall, overcome by the conviction that he had nothing more to do in the world.

Musadieu talked without stopping, and Bertin interrupted him, murmuring almost in spite of himself, under the impulse of his fixed idea:

"Annette was charming this evening."

"Yes, delicious!"

The painter added, to prevent Musadieu from taking up the broken thread of his ideas: "She is prettier than her mother ever was."

To this the other agreed absent-mindedly, repeating "Yes, yes, yes!" several times in succession, without his mind having yet settled itself on this new idea.

Olivier endeavored to continue the subject, and in order to attract his attention by one of Musadieu's own favorite fads, he continued:

"She will have one of the first salons in Paris after her marriage."

That was enough, and the man of fashion, as well as the Inspector of Fine Arts, being convinced, he began to talk wisely of the social footing on which the Marquis de Farandal would stand in French society.

Bertin listened to him, and fancied Annette in a

large salon full of light, surrounded by men and women. This vision, too, made him jealous.

They were now going up the Boulevard Malesherbes. As they passed the Guilleroys' house the painter looked up. Lights seemed to be shining through the windows, among the openings in the curtains. He suspected that the duchess and the marquis had been invited to come and have a cup of tea. And a burning rage made him suffer terribly.

He still held Musadieu by the arm, and once or twice contradicted Musadieu in expressing his opinions about the future marquise. Even that commonplace voice in speaking of her caused her image to flit beside them in the night.

When they arrived at the painter's door, in the Avenue de Villiers, Bertin asked: "Will you come in?"

"No, thank you. It is late, and I am going to bed."

"Oh, come up for half an hour, and we'll have a little more talk."

"No, really. It is too late."

The thought of staying there alone, after the anguish he had just endured, filled Olivier's soul with horror. He had some one with him; he would retain him.

"Do come up; I want you to choose a sketch that I have intended for a long time to offer you."

The other, knowing that painters are not always in a giving mood, and that the remembrance of promises is short, seized the opportunity. In his capacity as Inspector of Fine Arts, he possessed a gallery of paintings that had been skillfully collected.

"I am with you," said he.

They entered.

The valet was aroused and brought some grog; and the talk was for some time all about painting. Bertin showed some studies, and begged Musadieu to take the one that pleased him best; Musadieu hestitated, disturbed by the gaslight, which deceived him as to tones. At last he chose a group of little girls skipping rope on a sidewalk; and then he wished to depart, and take his present with him.

"I will have it taken to your house," said the painter.

"No; I should prefer to have it this very evening, so that I may admire it while I am going to bed," said Musadieu.

Nothing could detain him, and Olivier Bertin found himself again alone in his house, that prison of his memories and of his painful agitation.

When the servant entered the next morning, bringing tea and the newspapers, he found his master sitting up in bed, so pale that he was alarmed.

"Is monsieur indisposed?" he inquired.

"It is nothing—only a little headache."

"Does not monsieur wish me to bring him something?"

"No. What sort of weather is it?"

"It rains, monsieur."

"Very well. That is all."

The man withdrew, having placed on the little table the tea-tray and the newspapers.

Olivier took up the *Figaro* and opened it. The leading article was entitled "Modern Painting." It was a dithyrambic eulogy on four or five young painters who, gifted as colorists, with real ability

which they exaggerated for effect, now pretended to be revolutionists and renovators of genius.

As did all the older painters, Bertin sneered at these newcomers, was irritated at their assumption of exclusiveness, and disputed their doctrines. He began to read this article, then, with the rising anger so quickly felt by a nervous person; at last, glancing a little further down, he saw his own name, and these words at the end of a sentence struck him like a blow of the fist full in the chest: "The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

He had always been sensitive to either criticism or praise, but, at the bottom of his heart, in spite of his legitimate vanity, he suffered more from being criticised than he enjoyed being praised, because of the uneasiness concerning himself which his vacillation had always encouraged. Formerly, however, at the time of his triumphs, the incense offered was so frequent that it made him forget the pin-pricks. To-day, before the ceaseless influx of new artists and new admirers, congratulations were more rare and criticism was more marked. He felt that he had been enrolled in the battalion of old painters of talent, whom the younger ones do not treat as masters; and as he was as intelligent as he was perspicacious he suffered now from the least insinuations as much as from direct attacks.

But he never had any wound to his pride as an artist hurt him like this. He remained gasping, and reread the article in order to grasp its every meaning. He and his equals were thrown aside with outrageous disrespect; and he arose murmuring those words, which remained on his lips: "The old-fashioned art of Olivier Bertin."

Never had such sadness, such discouragement, such a sensation of having reached the end of everything, the end of his mental and physical being, thrown him into such desperate distress of soul. He sat until two o'clock in his armchair, before the fireplace, his legs extended toward the fire, not having strength to move, or to do anything. Then the need of being consoled rose within him, the need to clasp devoted hands, to see faithful eyes, to be pitied, succored, caressed with friendly words. So he went, as usual, to the countess.

When he entered, Annette was alone in the drawing room, standing with her back toward him, hastily writing the address on a letter. On a table beside her lay a copy of *Figaro*. Bertin saw the journal at the moment that he saw the young girl and was bewildered, not daring to advance! Oh, if she had read it! She turned, and in a preoccupied, hurried way, her mind haunted with feminine cares, she said to him:

"Ah, good-morning, sir painter! You will excuse me if I leave you? I have a dressmaker upstairs who claims me. You understand that a dressmaker, at the time of a wedding, is very important. I will lend you mamma, who is talking and arguing with my artist. If I need her I will call her for a few minutes."

And she hastened away, running a little, to show how much she was hurried.

This abrupt departure, without a word of affection, without a tender look for him who loved her so much—so much!—quite upset him. His eyes rested again on the *Figaro,* and he thought: "She has read it! They laugh at me, they deny me. She

no longer believes in me. I am nothing to her any more."

He took two steps toward the journal, as one walks toward a man to strike him. Then he said to himself: "Perhaps she has not read it, after all. She is so preoccupied to-day. But someone will undoubtedly speak of it before her, perhaps this evening, at dinner, and that will make her curious to read it."

With a spontaneous, almost unthinking, movement he took the copy, closed it, folded it, and slipped it into his pocket with the swiftness of a thief.

The countess entered. As soon as she saw Olivier's convulsed and livid face, she guessed that he had reached the limit of suffering.

She was impelled toward him, with all the impulse of her poor soul, and of her whole being that was so sorely wounded. Throwing her hands upon his shoulders, and plunging her glance into the depths of his eyes, she said:

"Oh, how unhappy you are!"

This time he did not deny it; his throat swelled with a spasm of pain, and he stammered:

"Yes—yes—yes!"

She felt that he was near weeping, and led him into the darkest corner of the drawing room, toward two armchairs hidden by a small screen of antique silk. They sat down behind this slight embroidered wall, veiled also by the gray shadow of a rainy day.

She resumed, pitying him, deeply moved by his grief:

"My poor Olivier, how you suffer!"

He leaned his white head on the shoulder of his friend.

"More than you believe!" he said.

"Oh, I knew it! I have felt it all. I saw it from the beginning and watched it grow."

He answered as if she had accused him: "It is not my fault, Any."

"I know it well; I do not reproach you for it."

And softly, turning a little, she saw a tear in one of Olivier's eyes.

She started and repeated:

"Ah, poor friend—poor friend—poor friend!"

Then after a moment of silence she added: "It is the fault of our hearts, which never have grown old. I feel that my own is full of life!"

He tried to speak but could not, for now his sobs choked him. She listened, as he leaned against her, to the struggle in his breast. Then, seized by the selfish anguish of love, which had gnawed at her heart so long, she said in the agonized tone in which one realizes a horrible misfortune.

"My God! how you love her!"

Again he confessed: "Ah, yes! I love her!"

She reflected a few moments, then continued: "You never loved me like that?"

He did not deny it, for he was passing through one of those periods in which one speaks the absolute truth, and he murmured:

"No, I was too young then."

She was surprised.

"Too young? Why?"

"Because life was too sweet. It is only at our age that one loves despairingly."

"Does the love you feel for her resemble that which you felt for me?" the countess asked.

"Yes and no—and yet it is almost the same thing. I have loved you as much as any one can love a woman. As for her, I love her just as I loved you, since she is yourself; but this love has become something irresistible, consuming, stronger than death. I belong to it as a burning house belongs to the fire."

She felt her sympathy wither up under a breath of jealousy; but, assuming a consoling tone, she said:

"My poor friend! In a few days she will be married and gone. When you see her no longer, no doubt you will be cured of this fancy."

He shook his head.

"Oh, I am lost, lost, lost!"

"No, no, I say! It will be three months before you see her again. That will be sufficient. Three months were quite enough for you to learn to love her more than you love me, whom you have known for twelve years!"

Then, in his infinite distress, he implored: "Any, do not desert me!"

"What can I do, my friend?"

"Do not leave me alone."

"I will go to see you as often as you wish."

"No. Keep me here as much as possible."

"But then you would be near her."

"And near you!"

"You must not see her any more before her marriage."

"Oh, Any!"

"Well, at least, not often."

"May I stay here this evening?"

"No, not in your present condition. You must divert your mind; go to the club, or the theatre—no matter where, but do not stay here."

"I entreat you——"

"No, Olivier, it is impossible. And, besides, I have guests coming to dinner whose presence would agitate you still more."

"The duchess and—he?"

"Yes."

"But I spent last evening with them."

"And you speak of it! You are in a fine state to-day."

"I promise to be calm."

"No, it is impossible."

"Then I am going away."

"Why do you hurry now?"

"I must walk."

"That is right! Walk a great deal, walk until evening, kill yourself with fatigue and then go to bed."

He had risen.

"Good-by, Any!"

"Good-by, dear friend. I will come to see you to-morrow evening. Would you like me to do something very imprudent, as I used to do—pretend to lunch here at noon, and then go and have luncheon with you at a quarter past one?"

"Yes, I should like it very much. You are so good!"

"It is because I love you."

"And I love you, too."

"Oh, don't speak of that any more!"

"Good-by, Any."

"Good-by, dear friend, till to-morrow."

"Good-by."

He kissed her hands over and over again, then her brow, then the corner of her lips. His eyes were dry now, his bearing resolute. Just as he was about to go, he threw his arms round her, and pressing his lips to her forehead, he seemed to drink in, to inhale from her all the love she had for him.

Then he departed quickly, without turning toward her again.

When she was alone she sank, sobbing, upon a chair. She would have remained there till night if Annette had not suddenly appeared in search of her. In order to gain time to dry her red eyelids, the countess answered: "I have a little note to write, my child. Go upstairs, and I will join you in a few seconds."

She was compelled to occupy herself with the great affair of the trousseau until evening.

The duchess and her nephew dined with the Guilleroys as a family party. They had just seated themselves at table and were speaking of the opera of the night before when the butler appeared, carrying three enormous bouquets.

Madame de Mortemain was surprised.

"Good gracious! what is that?"

"Oh, how lovely they are!" exclaimed Annette. "Who can have sent them?"

"Olivier Bertin, no doubt," replied her mother.

She had been thinking of him since his departure. He had seemed so gloomy, so tragic, she understood so clearly his hopeless sorrow, she felt so keenly the counter-stroke of that grief, she loved him so much, so entirely, so tenderly that her heart was weighed down by sad presentiments.

In the three bouquets were found three of the painter's cards. He had written on them in pencil, respectively, the names of the countess, the duchess and Annette.

"Is he ill, your friend Bertin?" the duchess inquired. "I thought he looked very ill last night."

"Yes, I am a little anxious about him, although he does not complain," Madame de Guilleroy answered.

"Oh, he is growing old, like all the rest of us," her husband interposed. "He is growing old quite fast, indeed. I believe, however, that bachelors usually go to pieces suddenly. Their breaking-up comes more abruptly than ours. He really is very much changed."

"Ah, yes!" sighed the countess.

Farandal suddenly stopped his whisperings to Annette to say: "The *Figaro* had a very disagreeable article about him this morning."

Any attack, any criticism or allusion unfavorable to her friend's talent always threw the countess into a passion.

"Oh," said she, "men of Bertin's importance need not mind such coarse attacks."

Guilleroy was astonished.

"What!" he exclaimed, "a disagreeable article about Olivier! Why, I did not see it. On what page?"

The marquis informed him: "The first page, at the top, with the title, 'Modern Painting.'"

And the deputy ceased to be astonished. "Oh, that is why! I did not read it because it was about painting."

Every one smiled, knowing that apart from poli-

tics and agriculture M. de Guilleroy was interested in very few things.

The conversation turned upon other subjects until they entered the drawing-room to take coffee. The countess was not listening and hardly answered, being pursued by anxiety as to what Olivier might be doing. Where was he? Where had he dined? Where had he taken his hopeless heart at that moment? She now felt a burning regret at having let him go, not to have kept him; and she fancied him roving the streets, so sad and lonely, fleeing under his burden of woe.

Up to the time of the departure of the duchess and her nephew she had hardly spoken, harassed by vague and superstitious fears. Then she went to bed and lay there, her eyes wide open in the darkness, thinking of him!

A long time had passed when she thought she heard the bell of the apartment ring. She started, sat up and listened. A second time the tinkle resounded in the stillness of the night.

She leaped out of bed, and with all her strength pressed the electric button that summoned her maid. Then, candle in hand, she ran to the vestibule.

Through the door she asked: "Who is there?"

"It is a letter," an unknown voice replied.

"A letter! From whom?"

"From a physician."

"What physician?"

"I do not know. It is about some accident."

Hesitating no more, she opened the door, and found herself facing a cab-driver in an oilskin cap. He held a paper in his hand, which he presented to

her. She read: "Very urgent—Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy."

The writing was unknown.

"Enter, my good man," said she. "Sit down and wait for me."

When she reached her husband's door her heart was beating so violently that she could not call him. She pounded on the wood with her metal candlestick. The count was asleep and did not hear.

Then, impatient, nervous, she kicked the door and heard a sleepy voice asking: "Who is there? What time is it?"

"It is I," she called. "I have an urgent letter for you, brought by a cabman. There has been some accident."

"Wait! I am getting up. I'll be there," he stammered from behind his bed-curtains.

In another minute he appeared in his dressing-gown. At the same time two servants came running, aroused by the ringing of the bell. They were alarmed and bewildered, having seen a stranger sitting on a chair in the dining-room.

The count had taken the letter and was turning it over in his fingers, murmuring: "What is that? I cannot imagine."

"Well, read it, then!" said the countess in a fever.

He tore off the envelope, unfolded the paper, uttered an exclamation of amazement, then looked at his wife with frightened eyes.

"My God! what is it?" said she.

He stammered, hardly able to speak, so great was his emotion: "Oh, a great misfortune—a great misfortune! Bertin has been run over!"

"Dead!" she cried.

"No, no!" said he. "Read for yourself."

She snatched from his hand the letter he held out and read:

MONSIEUR: A great misfortune has just happened. Your friend, the eminent artist, M. Olivier Bertin, has been run over by an omnibus, the wheel of which passed over his body. I cannot as yet say anything decisive as to the probable result of this accident, which may not be serious, although it may have an immediate and fatal result. M. Bertin begs you earnestly and entreats Madame la Comtesse de Guilleroy to come to him at once. I hope, monsieur, that Madame la Comtesse and yourself will grant the desire of our friend, who before daylight may have ceased to live.

DR. DE RIVIL.

The countess stared at her husband with great, staring eyes, full of terror. Then suddenly, like an electric shock, she experienced an awakening of that courage which comes to women, which makes them at times, in moments of terror, the most valiant of creatures.

Turning toward her maid, she said: "Quick! I am going to dress."

"What will madame wear?" asked the servant.

"Never mind that. Anything you like. James," she added, "be ready in five minutes."

Returning toward her room, her soul overwhelmed, she noticed the cabman still waiting and said to him: "You have your carriage?"

"Yes, madame."

"That is well. We will take that."

Wildly, with precipitate haste, she threw on her clothes, hooking, clasping, tying and fastening at haphazard. Then, before the mirror, she lifted and twisted her hair without a semblance of order, gazing without thinking of what she was doing at the reflection of her pale face and haggard eyes.

When her cloak was on her shoulders, she rushed

to her husband's room, but he was not yet ready. She dragged him along.

"Come, come!" said she; "remember, he may die!"

The count, dazed, followed her stumblingly, feeling his way with his feet on the dark stairs, trying to distinguish the steps, so that he should not fall.

The drive was short and silent. The countess trembled so violently that her teeth rattled, and through the window she saw the flying gas-jets, veiled by the falling rain. The sidewalks gleamed, the Boulevard was deserted, the night was threatening. On arriving, they found that the painter's door was open and that the concierge's lodge was lighted, but empty.

At the top of the stairs the physician, Dr. de Rivil, a little gray man, short, round, very well dressed, extremely polite, came to meet them. He bowed low to the countess and held out his hand to the count.

Breathing rapidly, as if climbing the stairs had exhausted her, she said:

"Well, doctor?"

"Well, madame, I hope that it will be less serious than I at first thought."

"He will not die?" she exclaimed.

"No. At least, I do not believe so."

"Will you answer for that?"

"No. I only say that I hope to find only a simple abdominal contusion without internal lesions."

"What do you call lesions?"

"Ruptures."

"How do you know that there are none?"

"I judge so."

"And if there are?"

"Oh, then it would be serious."

"He might die of them?"

"Yes."

"Very soon?"

"Very soon. In a few minutes or even seconds. But reassure yourself, madame; I am convinced that he will be quite well again in two weeks."

She had listened, with profound attention, to know all and understand all.

"What rupture might he have?"

"A rupture of the liver, for instance."

"That would be very dangerous?"

"Yes—but I should be surprised to find any complication now. Let us go to him. It will do him good, for he awaits you with great impatience."

On entering the room she saw first a pallid face on a white pillow. Some candles and the firelight illumined it, defined the profile, deepened the shadows; and in that pale face the countess saw two eyes that watched her coming.

All her courage, energy and resolution fell, so much did those hollow and altered features resemble those of a dying man. He, whom she had seen only a little while ago, had become this thing, this spectre! "Oh, my God!" she murmured beneath her breath, and she approached him, trembling with horror.

He tried to smile, to reassure her, and the grimace of that attempt was frightful.

When she was beside the bed, she put both hands gently on one of Olivier's, which lay alongside him, and faltered: "Oh, my poor friend!"

"It is nothing," said he in a low tone, without moving his head.

She now looked at him closely, frightened at the change in him. He was so pale that he seemed no longer to have a drop of blood under his skin. His hollow cheeks seemed to have been sucked in from the interior of his face, and his eyes were sunken as if drawn by a string from within.

He saw the terror of his friend and sighed: "Here I am in a fine condition!"

"How did it happen?" she asked, looking at him with fixed gaze.

He was making a great effort to speak, and his whole face twitched with pain.

"I was not looking about me—I was thinking of something else—something very different—oh, yes! —and an omnibus knocked me down and ran over my abdomen."

As she listened she saw the accident, and shaking with terror, she asked: "Did you bleed?"

"No. I am only a little bruised—a little crushed."

"Where did it happen?" she inquired.

"I do not know exactly," he answered in a very low voice; "it was far away from here."

The physician rolled up an armchair, and the countess sank into it. The count remained standing at the foot of the bed, murmuring: "Oh, my poor friend! my poor friend! What a frightful misfortune!"

And he was indeed deeply grieved, for he loved Olivier very much.

"But where did it happen?" the countess repeated.

"I know hardly anything about it myself, or rather I do not understand it at all," the physician replied. "It was at the Gobelins, almost outside Paris! At least, the cabman that brought him home declared to

me that he took him from a pharmacy of that quarter, to which some one had carried him, at nine o'clock in the evening!" Then, leaning toward Olivier, he asked: "Did the accident really happen near the Gobelins?"

Bertin closed his eyes, as if to recollect, then murmured: "I do not know."

"But where were you going?"

"I do not remember now. I was walking straight ahead."

A groan that she could not stifle came from the countess' lips. Then oppressed with a choking that stopped her breathing a few seconds, she drew out her handkerchief, covered her eyes and wept bitterly.

She knew—she guessed! Something intolerable, overwhelming had just fallen on her heart—remorse for not having kept Olivier near her, for driving him away, for throwing him into the street, where, stupefied with grief, he had fallen under the omnibus.

He said in that colorless voice he now had: "Do not weep. It distresses me."

By a tremendous effort of will she ceased to sob, uncovered her eyes and fixed them, wide open, upon him, without a quiver of her face, over which the tears continued to roll slowly.

They looked at each other, both motionless, their hands clasped. They gazed at each other, no longer knowing that any other person was in the room, and that gaze bore a more than human emotion from one heart to the other.

It was between them the swift, silent and terrible evocation of all their memories, of all their love, crushed also; of all they had felt together, of all that had been united and blended in their lives, in that

mutual attraction which had made them give themselves to each other.

They gazed at one another, and the need to speak to each other, to hear the thousand intimate, sad things which they had still to say rose irresistibly to their lips. She felt that she must, at any price, send away the two men that stood behind her; she must find a way, some ruse, some inspiration, she, the woman, fruitful in resources! She began to reflect, her eyes always fixed on Olivier.

Her husband and the doctor were talking in undertones, discussing the care of the patient. Turning her head, the countess said to the doctor: "Have you brought a nurse?"

"No, I prefer to send a hospital surgeon, who will keep a better watch over the case."

"Send both. One never can be too careful. Can you get them to-night, for I do not suppose you will stay here till morning?"

"Indeed, I was just about to go home. I have been here four hours already."

"But on your way back you will send us the nurse and the surgeon?"

"It will be difficult in the middle of the night. But I will try."

"You must!"

"They may promise, but will they come?"

"My husband will accompany you and will bring them back either willingly or by force."

"You cannot remain here alone, madame!"

"I?" she exclaimed with a sort of cry of defiance, of indignant protest against any resistance to her will. Then she pointed out, in that authoritative tone to which no one ventures a reply, the necessi-

ties of the situation. It was necessary that the nurse and the surgeon should be there within an hour, to forestall all accident. To insure this, some one must get out of bed and bring them. Her husband alone could do that. During this time she would remain near the injured man, she, for whom it was a duty and a right. She would be simply fulfilling her duty as a friend, her duty as a woman. Besides, she chose to do it, and no one should dissuade her from it.

Her reasoning was sensible. They had to give in, and they decided to obey her.

She had risen, full of the thought of their departure, impatient to know that they were off and that she was left alone. Now, in order that she should commit no error during their absence, she listened, trying to understand perfectly, to remember everything, to forget nothing of the physician's directions. The painter's valet, standing near her, listened also, and behind him his wife, the cook, who had helped in the first bandaging of the patient, indicated by nods of the head that she too understood. When the countess had recited all the instructions like a lesson, she urged the two men to go, repeating to her husband:

"Come back soon; above all things, come back soon!"

"I will take you in my coupé," said the doctor to the count. "It will bring you back quicker. You will be here again in an hour."

Before leaving, the doctor again carefully examined the wounded man, to assure himself that his condition remained satisfactory.

Guilleroy still hesitated.

"You do not think that we are doing anything imprudent?" he asked.

"No," said the doctor. "He needs only rest and quiet. Madame de Guilleroy will see that he does not talk, and will speak to him as little as possible."

The countess was startled and said:

"Then I must not talk to him?"

"Oh, no, madame! Take an armchair and sit beside him. He will not feel that he is alone and will be quite content; but no fatigue of words or even of thoughts. I will call about nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Good-by, madame. I salute you!"

He left the room with a low bow, followed by the count, who repeated:

"Do not worry yourself, my dear. Within an hour I shall return, and then you can go home."

When they were gone, she listened for the sound of the door below being closed, then to the rolling wheels of the coupé in the street.

The valet and the cook still stood there, awaiting orders. The countess dismissed them.

"You may go now," said she; "I will ring if I need anything."

They too withdrew, and she remained alone with him.

She had drawn close to the bed, and putting her hands on the two edges of the pillow, on both sides of that dear face, she leaned over to look upon it. Then, with her face so close to his that she seemed to breathe her words upon it, she whispered:

"Did you throw yourself under that carriage?"

He tried to smile still, saying: "No, the carriage threw itself upon me."

"That is not true; it was you."

"No, I swear to you it was *it!*"

After a few moments of silence, those instants when souls seem mingled in glances, she murmured: "Oh, my dear, dear Olivier, to think that I let you go, that I did not keep you with me!"

"It would have happened just the same, one day or another," he replied with conviction.

They still gazed at each other, seeking to read each other's inmost thoughts.

"I do not think I shall recover," he said at last. "I am in such pain."

"Do you suffer very much?" she murmured.

"Oh, yes!"

Bending a little lower, she brushed his forehead, then his eyes, then his cheeks with slow kisses, light, delicate as her care for him. She barely touched him with her lips, with that soft little touch that children give when they kiss. This lasted a long time, a very long time. He let that shower of tender kisses fall on him, and they seemed to soothe and refresh him, for his drawn face twitched less than before.

"Any!" he said finally.

She ceased kissing him to listen.

"What, my friend?"

"You must make me a promise."

"I will promise anything you wish."

"If I am not dead before morning, swear to me that you will bring Annette to me, just once, only once! I cannot bear to die without seeing her again. Think that—to-morrow—at this time—perhaps I shall have—shall surely have closed my eyes forever—and that I never shall see you again—you—nor her!"

She stopped him; her heart was breaking.

"Oh, hush—hush! Yes, I promise you to bring her!"

"You swear it?"

"I swear it, my friend. But hush, do not talk any more. You grieve me frightfully—hush!"

A quick convulsion passed over his face. When it had passed he said:

"Since we have only a few minutes more to remain together, do not let us lose them; let us seize them to bid each other good-by. I have loved you so much——"

"And I," she sighed, "how I still love you!"

He spoke again:

"I never have had real happiness except through you. Only these last days have been hard. It was not your fault. Ah, my poor Any, how sad life is! —and how hard it is to die!"

"Hush, Olivier, I implore you!"

He continued, without listening to her: "I should have been such a happy man if you had not had your daughter——"

"Hush! My God! Hush!"

He seemed to dream rather than speak.

"Ah, he that invented this existence and made men was either blind or very wicked."

"Olivier, I entreat you—if you ever have loved me, be quiet, do not talk like that any more!"

He looked at her, leaning over him, she herself so pale that she looked as if she were dying, too; and he was silent.

Then she seated herself in the armchair, close to the bed, and again took the hand on the coverlet.

"Now I forbid you to speak," said she. "Do not stir, and think of me as I think of you."

Again they looked at each other, motionless, joined together by the burning contact of their hands. She pressed, with gentle movement, the feverish hand she clasped and he answered these calls by tightening his fingers a little. Each pressure said something to them, evoked some period of their finished past, revived in their memory the stagnant recollections of their love. Each was a secret question, each was a mysterious reply, sad questions and sad replies, those "do you remembers?" of a bygone love.

Their minds, in this agonizing meeting, which might be the last, travelled back through the years, through the whole history of their passion; and nothing was audible in the room save the crackling of the fire.

Suddenly, as if awakening from a dream, he said, with a start of terror:

"Your letters!"

"What? My letters?" she queried.

"I might have died without destroying them!"

"Oh, what does that matter to me? That is of no consequence now. Let them find them and read them —I don't care!"

"I will not have that," he said. "Get up, Any; open the lowest drawer of my desk, the large one. They are all there, all. You must take them and throw them into the fire."

She did not move at all, but remained crouching, as if he had counseled her to do something cowardly.

"Any, I entreat you!" he continued; "if you do not do this, you will torture me, unnerve me, drive me mad. Think—they may fall into any one's hands,

a notary, a servant or even your husband—I do not wish——"

She rose, still hesitating and repeating:

"No, that is too hard, too cruel! I feel as if you were compelling me to burn both our hearts!"

He supplicated her, his face drawn with pain.

Seeing him suffer thus, she resigned herself and walked toward the desk. On opening the drawer, she found it filled to the edge with a thick packet of letters, piled one on top of another, and she recognized on all the envelopes the two lines of the address she had written so often. She knew them—those two lines—a man's name, the name of a street—as well as she knew her own name, as well as one can know the few words that have represented to us in life all hope and all happiness. She looked at them, those little square things that contained all she had known how to express of her love, all that she could take of herself to give to him with a little ink on a bit of white paper.

He had tried to turn his head on the pillow that he might watch her, and again he said: "Burn them, quick!"

Then she took two handfuls, holding them a few seconds in her grasp. They seemed heavy to her, painful, living, at the same time dead, so many different things were in them, so many things that were now over—so sweet to feel, to dream! It was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, the essence of her loving self that she was holding there; and she remembered with what delirium she had scribbled some of them, with what exaltation, what intoxication of living and of adoring some one, and of expressing it.

"Burn them! burn them, Any!" Olivier repeated.

With the same movement of both hands she cast into the fireplace the two packets of papers, which became scattered as they fell upon the wood. Then she seized those that remained in the desk and threw them on top of the others, then another handful, with swift movements, stooping and rising again quickly, to finish as soon as might be this terrible task.

When the fireplace was full and the drawer empty, she remained standing, waiting, watching the almost smothered flames as they crept up from all sides on that mountain of envelopes. They attacked them first at the edges, gnawed at the corners, ran along the edge of the paper, went out, sprang up again and went creeping on and on. Soon, all around that white pyramid glowed a vivid girdle of clear fire which filled the room with light; and this light, illuminating the woman standing and the man dying, was their love being consumed, their love turning to ashes.

The countess turned, and in the dazzling light of that fire she beheld her friend leaning, with a haggard face, over the edge of the bed.

"Are they all there?" he demanded.

"Yes, all."

But before returning to him she cast a last look upon that destruction, and on that mass of papers already half consumed, twisting and turning black, she saw something red flowing. It looked like drops of blood, and seemed to come out of the very heart of the letters, as from a wound; it ran slowly toward the flames, leaving a purple train.

The countess felt in her soul a shock of super-

natural terror, and recoiled as if she had seen the assassination of a human being; then she suddenly understood that she had seen simply the melting of the wax seals.

She returned to the wounded man, and lifting his head tenderly, laid it back in the centre of the pillow. But he had moved, and his pain increased. He was gasping now, his face drawn by fearful suffering, and he no longer seemed to know that she was there.

She waited for him to become a little calmer, to open his eyes, which remained closed, to be able to say one word more to her.

Presently she asked: "Do you suffer much?"

He did not reply.

She bent over him and laid a finger on his forehead to make him look at her. He opened his eyes then, but they were wild and dazed.

Terrified, she repeated: "Do you suffer? Olivier! Answer me! Shall I call? Make an effort! Say something to me!"

She thought she heard him murmur: "Bring her —you swore to me——"

Then he writhed under the bedclothes, his body grew rigid, his face was convulsed from pain.

"Olivier! my God! Olivier!" she cried. "What is the matter? Shall I call?"

This time he heard her, for he replied: "No—it is nothing."

He appeared to grow easier, in fact, to suffer less, to fall suddenly into a sort of drowsy stupor. Hoping that he would sleep, she sat down again beside the bed, took his hand and waited. He moved no more, his chin had dropped to his breast, his mouth

was half opened by his short breath, which seemed to rasp his throat in passing. Only his fingers moved involuntarily now and then, with slight tremors which the countess felt to the roots of her hair, making her long to cry out. They were no more the tender little meaning pressures which, in place of the weary lips, told of all the sadness of their hearts; they were spasms of pain which spoke only of the torture of the body.

Now she was frightened, terribly frightened, and had a wild desire to run away, to ring, to call, but she dared not move, lest she might disturb his repose.

She heard the distant sound of carriages in the street and listened to see if one did not stop at the door, to see if her husband was not coming back to rescue her, to snatch her from this terrible *tête-à-tête*.

As she tried to disengage her hand from Olivier's he tightened his clasp and uttered a deep sigh. So she resigned herself to waiting, for fear of agitating him.

The fire was dying in the grate, smothered by the black ashes of the letters; two of the candles went out; a piece of furniture cracked.

All was silent in the house, all seemed dead, except the Flemish clock on the stairs, which unfailingly chimed the hour, the half and the quarter, chanting through the night the march of Time in various modulations of tone.

The countess, motionless, felt an intolerable terror coming over her. She saw visions, frightful thoughts came into her mind, and she seemed to feel Olivier's fingers growing cold in her clasp. Could it be? No, of course not! But what was this inde-

scribable sensation as of touching ice? She rose, wild with terror, to look at his face. It was relaxed, impassive, lifeless, indifferent to all sorrow, suddenly restored to peace by Eternal Oblivion.

USELESS BEAUTY

I

ABOUT half-past five one afternoon at the end of June when the sun was shining warm and bright into the large courtyard, a very elegant victoria with two beautiful black horses drew up in front of the mansion.

The Comtesse de Mascaret came down the steps just as her husband, who was coming home, appeared in the carriage entrance. He stopped for a few moments to look at his wife and turned rather pale. The countess was very beautiful, graceful and distinguished looking, with her long oval face, her complexion like yellow ivory, her large gray eyes and her black hair; and she got into her carriage without looking at him, without even seeming to have noticed him, with such a particularly high-bred air, that the furious jealousy by which he had been devoured for so long again gnawed at his heart. He went up to her and said: "You are going for a drive?"

She merely replied disdainfully: "You see I am!"

"In the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Most probably."

"May I come with you?"

"The carriage belongs to you."

Without being surprised at the tone in which she answered him, he got in and sat down by his wife's side and said: "Bois de Boulogne." The footman

jumped up beside the coachman, and the horses as usual pranced and tossed their heads until they were in the street. Husband and wife sat side by side without speaking. He was thinking how to begin a conversation, but she maintained such an obstinately hard look that he did not venture to make the attempt. At last, however, he cunningly, accidentally as it were, touched the countess' gloved hand with his own, but she drew her arm away with a movement which was so expressive of disgust that he remained thoughtful, in spite of his usual authoritative and despotic character, and he said: "Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"I think you are looking adorable."

She did not reply, but remained lying back in the carriage, looking like an irritated queen. By that time they were driving up the Champs Elysées, toward the Arc de Triomphe. That immense monument, at the end of the long avenue, raised its colossal arch against the red sky and the sun seemed to be descending on it, showering fiery dust on it from the sky.

The stream of carriages, with dashes of sunlight reflected in the silver trappings of the harness and the glass of the lamps, flowed on in a double current toward the town and toward the Bois, and the Comte de Mascaret continued: "My dear Gabrielle!"

Unable to control herself any longer, she replied in an exasperated voice: "Oh! do leave me in peace, pray! I am not even allowed to have my carriage to myself now." He pretended not to hear

her and continued: "You never have looked so pretty as you do to-day."

Her patience had come to an end, and she replied with irrepressible anger: "You are wrong to notice it, for I swear to you that I will never have anything to do with you in that way again."

The count was decidedly stupefied and upset, and, his violent nature gaining the upper hand, he exclaimed: "What do you mean by that?" in a tone that betrayed rather the brutal master than the lover. She replied in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear amid the deafening noise of the wheels: "Ah! What do I mean by that? What do I mean by that? Now I recognize you again! Do you want me to tell everything?"

"Yes."

"Everything that has weighed on my heart since I have been the victim of your terrible selfishness?"

He had grown red with surprise and anger and he growled between his closed teeth: "Yes, tell me everything."

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a big red beard, a handsome man, a nobleman, a man of the world, who passed as a perfect husband and an excellent father, and now, for the first time since they had started, she turned toward him and looked him full in the face: "Ah! You will hear some disagreeable things, but you must know that I am prepared for everything, that I fear nothing, and you less than any one to-day."

He also was looking into her eyes and was already shaking with rage as he said in a low voice: "You are mad."

"No, but I will no longer be the victim of the

hateful penalty of maternity, which you have inflicted on me for eleven years! I wish to take my place in society as I have the right to do, as all women have the right to do."

He suddenly grew pale again and stammered: "I do not understand you."

"Oh! yes; you understand me well enough. It is now three months since I had my last child, and as I am still very beautiful, and as, in spite of all your efforts you cannot spoil my figure, as you just now perceived, when you saw me on the doorstep, you think it is time that I should think of having another child."

"But you are talking nonsense!"

"No, I am not, I am thirty, and I have had seven children, and we have been married eleven years, and you hope that this will go on for ten years longer, after which you will leave off being jealous."

He seized her arm and squeezed it, saying: "I will not allow you to talk to me like that much longer."

"And I shall talk to you till the end, until I have finished all I have to say to you, and if you try to prevent me, I shall raise my voice so that the two servants, who are on the box, may hear. I only allowed you to come with me for that object, for I have these witnesses who will oblige you to listen to me and to contain yourself, so now pay attention to what I say. I have always felt an antipathy to you, and I have always let you see it, for I have never lied, monsieur. You married me in spite of myself; you forced my parents, who were in embarrassed circumstances, to give me to you, because

you were rich, and they obliged me to marry you in spite of my tears.

"So you bought me, and as soon as I was in your power, as soon as I had become your companion, ready to attach myself to you, to forget your coercive and threatening proceedings, in order that I might only remember that I ought to be a devoted wife and to love you as much as it might be possible for me to love you, you became jealous, you, as no man has ever been before, with the base, ignoble jealousy of a spy, which was as degrading to you as it was to me. I had not been married eight months when you suspected me of every perfidiousness, and you even told me so. What a disgrace! And as you could not prevent me from being beautiful and from pleasing people, from being called in drawing-rooms and also in the newspapers one of the most beautiful women in Paris, you tried everything you could think of to keep admirers from me, and you hit upon the abominable idea of making me spend my life in a constant state of motherhood, until the time should come when I should disgust every man. Oh, do not deny it. I did not understand it for some time, but then I guessed it. You even boasted about it to your sister, who told me of it, for she is fond of me and was disgusted at your boorish coarseness.

"Ah! Remember how you have behaved in the past! How for eleven years you have compelled me to give up all society and simply be a mother to your children. And then you would grow disgusted with me and I was sent into the country, the family château, among fields and meadows. And when I reappeared, fresh, pretty and unspoiled, still seductive and constantly surrounded by admirers, hoping

that at last I should live a little more like a rich young society woman, you were seized with jealousy again, and you began once more to persecute me with that infamous and hateful desire from which you are suffering at this moment by my side. And it is not the desire of possessing me—for I should never have refused myself to you, but it is the wish to make me unsightly.

"And then that abominable and mysterious thing occurred which I was a long time in understanding (but I grew sharp by dint of watching your thoughts and actions): You attached yourself to your children with all the security which they gave you while I bore them. You felt affection for them, with all your aversion to me, and in spite of your ignoble fears, which were momentarily allayed by your pleasure in seeing me lose my symmetry.

"Oh! how often have I noticed that joy in you! I have seen it in your eyes and guessed it. You loved your children as victories, and not because they were of your own blood. They were victories over me, over my youth, over my beauty, over my charms, over the compliments which were paid me and over those that were whispered around me without being paid to me personally. And you are proud of them, you make a parade of them, you take them out for drives in your break in the Bois de Boulogne and you give them donkey rides at Montmorency. You take them to theatrical matinées so that you may be seen in the midst of them, so that the people may say: 'What a kind father' and that it may be repeated——"

He had seized her wrist with savage brutality, and he squeezed it so violently that she was quiet

and nearly cried out with the pain and he said to her in a whisper:

"I love my children, do you hear? What you have just told me is disgraceful in a mother. But you belong to me; I am master—your master—I can exact from you what I like and when I like—and I have the law—on my side."

He was trying to crush her fingers in the strong grip of his large, muscular hand, and she, livid with pain, tried in vain to free them from that vise which was crushing them. The agony made her breathe hard and the tears came into her eyes. "You see that I am the master and the stronger," he said. When he somewhat loosened his grip, she asked him: "Do you think that I am a religious woman?"

He was surprised and stammered "Yes."

"Do you think that I could lie if I swore to the truth of anything to you before an altar on which Christ's body is?"

"No."

"Will you go with me to some church?"

"What for?"

"You shall see. Will you?"

"If you absolutely wish it, yes."

She raised her voice and said: "Philippe!" And the coachman, bending down a little, without taking his eyes from his horses, seemed to turn his ear alone toward his mistress, who continued: "Drive to St. Philippe-du-Roule." And the victoria, which had reached the entrance of the Bois de Boulogne, returned to Paris.

Husband and wife did not exchange a word further during the drive, and when the carriage stopped before the church Madame de Mascaret

jumped out and entered it, followed by the count, a few yards distant. She went, without stopping, as far as the choir-screen, and falling on her knees at a chair, she buried her face in her hands. She prayed for a long time, and he, standing behind her, could see that she was crying. She wept noiselessly, as women weep when they are in great, poignant grief. There was a kind of undulation in her body, which ended in a little sob, which was hidden and stifled by her fingers.

But the Comte de Mascaret thought that the situation was lasting too long, and he touched her on the shoulder. That contact recalled her to herself, as if she had been burned, and getting up, she looked straight into his eyes. "This is what I have to say to you. I am afraid of nothing, whatever you may do to me. You may kill me if you like. One of your children is not yours, and one only; that I swear to you before God, who hears me here. That was the only revenge that was possible for me in return for all your abominable masculine tyrannies, in return for the penal servitude of childbearing to which you have condemned me. Who was my lover? That you never will know! You may suspect every one, but you never will find out. I gave myself to him, without love and without pleasure, only for the sake of betraying you, and he also made me a mother. Which is the child? That also you never will know. I have seven; try to find out! I intended to tell you this later, for one has not avenged oneself on a man by deceiving him, unless he knows it. You have driven me to confess it today. I have now finished."

She hurried through the church toward the open

door, expecting to hear behind her the quick steps of her husband whom she had defied and to be knocked to the ground by a blow of his fist, but she heard nothing and reached her carriage. She jumped into it at a bound, overwhelmed with anguish and breathless with fear. So she called out to the coachman: "Home!" and the horses set off at a quick trot.

II

The Comtesse de Mascaret was waiting in her room for dinner time as a criminal sentenced to death awaits the hour of his execution. What was her husband going to do? Had he come home? Despotic, passionate, ready for any violence as he was, what was he meditating, what had he made up his mind to do? There was no sound in the house, and every moment she looked at the clock. Her lady's maid had come and dressed her for the evening and had then left the room again. Eight o'clock struck and almost at the same moment there were two knocks at the door, and the butler came in and announced dinner.

"Has the count come in?"

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse. He is in the dining-room."

For a little moment she felt inclined to arm herself with a small revolver which she had bought some time before, foreseeing the tragedy which was being rehearsed in her heart. But she remembered that all the children would be there, and she took nothing except a bottle of smelling salts. He rose somewhat ceremoniously from his chair. They exchanged a slight bow and sat down. The three

boys with their tutor, Abbé Martin, were on her right and the three girls, with Miss Smith, their English governess, were on her left. The youngest child, who was only three months old, remained upstairs with his nurse.

The abbé said grace as usual when there was no company, for the children did not come down to dinner when guests were present. Then they began dinner. The countess, suffering from emotion, which she had not calculated upon, remained with her eyes cast down, while the count scrutinized now the three boys and now the three girls with an uncertain, unhappy expression, which travelled from one to the other. Suddenly pushing his wineglass from him, it broke, and the wine was spilt on the tablecloth, and at the slight noise caused by this little accident the countess started up from her chair, and for the first time they looked at each other. Then, in spite of themselves, in spite of the irritation of their nerves caused by every glance, they continued to exchange looks, rapid as pistol shots.

The abbé, who felt that there was some cause for embarrassment which he could not divine, attempted to begin a conversation and tried various subjects, but his useless efforts gave rise to no ideas and did not bring out a word. The countess, with feminine tact and obeying her instincts of a woman of the world, attempted to answer him two or three times, but in vain. She could not find words, in the perplexity of her mind, and her own voice almost frightened her in the silence of the large room, where nothing was heard except the slight sound of plates and knives and forks.

Suddenly her husband said to her, bending for-

ward: "Here, amid your children, will you swear to me that what you told me just now is true?"

The hatred which was fermenting in her veins suddenly roused her, and replying to that question with the same firmness with which she had replied to his looks, she raised both her hands, the right pointing toward the boys and the left toward the girls, and said in a firm, resolute voice and without any hesitation: "On the head of my children, I swear that I have told you the truth."

He got up and throwing his table napkin on the table with a movement of exasperation, he turned round and flung his chair against the wall, and then went out without another word, while she, uttering a deep sigh, as if after a first victory, went on in a calm voice: "You must not pay any attention to what your father has just said, my darlings; he was very much upset a short time ago, but he will be all right again in a few days."

Then she talked with the abbé and Miss Smith and had tender, pretty words for all her children, those sweet, tender mother's ways which unfold little hearts.

When dinner was over she went into the drawing-room, all her children following her. She made the elder ones chatter, and when their bedtime came she kissed them for a long time and then went alone into her room.

She waited, for she had no doubt that the count would come, and she made up her mind then, as her children were not with her, to protect herself as a woman of the world as she would protect her life, and in the pocket of her dress she put the little loaded revolver which she had bought a few days

previously. The hours went by, the hours struck, and every sound was hushed in the house. Only the cabs continued to rumble through the streets, but their noise was only heard vaguely through the shuttered and curtained windows.

She waited, full of nervous energy, without any fear of him now, ready for anything, and almost triumphant, for she had found means of torturing him continually during every moment of his life.

But the first gleam of dawn came in through the fringe at the bottom of her curtain without his having come into her room, and then she awoke to the fact, with much amazement, that he was not coming. Having locked and bolted her door, for greater security, she went to bed at last and remained there, with her eyes open, thinking and barely understanding it all, without being able to guess what he was going to do.

When her maid brought her tea she at the same time handed her a letter from her husband. He told her that he was going to undertake a longish journey and in a postscript added that his lawyer would provide her with any sums of money she might require for all her expenses.

III

It was at the opera, between two acts of "Robert the Devil." In the stalls the men were standing up, with their hats on, their waistcoats cut very low so as to show a large amount of white shirt front, in which gold and jewelled studs glistened, and were looking at the boxes full of ladies in low dresses covered with diamonds and pearls, who were ex-

panding like flowers in that illuminated hothouse, where the beauty of their faces and the whiteness of their shoulders seemed to bloom in order to be gazed at, amid the sound of the music and of human voices.

Two friends, with their backs to the orchestra, were scanning those rows of elegance, that exhibition of real or false charms, of jewels, of luxury and of pretension which displayed itself in all parts of the Grand Théâtre, and one of them, Roger de Salnis, said to his companion, Bernard Grandin: "Just look how beautiful the Comtesse de Mascaret still is."

The older man in turn looked through his opera glasses at a tall lady in a box opposite. She appeared to be still very young, and her striking beauty seemed to attract all eyes in every corner of the house. Her pale complexion, of an ivory tint, gave her the appearance of a statue, while a small diamond coronet glistened on her black hair like a streak of light.

When he had looked at her for some time, Bernard Grandin replied with a jocular accent of sincere conviction: "You may well call her beautiful!"

"How old do you think she is?"

"Wait a moment. I can tell you exactly, for I have known her since she was a child and I saw her make her *début* into society when she was quite a girl. She is—she is—thirty—thirty-six."

"Impossible!"

"I am sure of it."

"She looks twenty-five."

"She has had seven children."

"It is incredible."

"And what is more, they are all seven alive, as

she is a very good mother. I occasionally go to the house, which is a very quiet and pleasant one, where one may see the phenomenon of the family in the midst of society."

"How very strange! And have there never been any reports about her?"

"Never."

"But what about her husband? He is peculiar, is he not?"

"Yes and no. Very likely there has been a little drama between them, one of those little domestic dramas which one suspects, never finds out exactly, but guesses at pretty closely."

"What is it?"

"I do not know anything about it. Mascaret leads a very fast life now, after being a model husband. As long as he remained a good spouse he had a shocking temper, was crabbed and easily took offence, but since he has been leading his present wild life he has become quite different. But one might surmise that he has some trouble, a worm gnawing somewhere, for he has aged very much."

Thereupon the two friends talked philosophically for some minutes about the secret, unknowable troubles which differences of character or perhaps physical antipathies, which were not perceived at first, give rise to in families, and then Roger de Salnis, who was still looking at Madame de Mascaret through his opera glasses, said: "It is almost incredible that that woman can have had seven children!"

"Yes, in eleven years; after which, when she was thirty, she refused to have any more, in order to

take her place in society, which she seems likely to do for many years."

"Poor women!"

"Why do you pity them?"

"Why? Ah! my dear fellow, just consider! Eleven years in a condition of motherhood for such a woman! What a hell! All her youth, all her beauty, every hope of success, every poetical ideal of a brilliant life sacrificed to that abominable law of reproduction which turns the normal woman into a mere machine for bringing children into the world."

"What would you have? It is only Nature!"

"Yes, but I say that Nature is our enemy, that we must always fight against Nature, for she is continually bringing us back to an animal state. You may be sure that God has not put anything on this earth that is clean, pretty, elegant or accessory to our ideal; the human brain has done it. It is man who has introduced a little grace, beauty, unknown charm and mystery into creation by singing about it, interpreting it, by admiring it as a poet, idealizing it as an artist and by explaining it through science, doubtless making mistakes, but finding ingenious reasons, hidden grace and beauty, unknown charm and mystery in the various phenomena of Nature. God created only coarse beings, full of the germs of disease, who, after a few years of bestial enjoyment, grow old and infirm, with all the ugliness and all the want of power of human decrepitude. He seems to have made them only in order that they may reproduce their species in an ignoble manner and then die like ephemeral insects. I said *reproduce their species in an ignoble manner* and I adhere

to that expression. What is there as a matter of fact more ignoble and more repugnant than that act of reproduction of living beings, against which all delicate minds always have revolted and always will revolt? Since all the organs which have been invented by this economical and malicious Creator serve two purposes, why did He not choose another method of performing that sacred mission, which is the noblest and the most exalted of all human functions? The mouth, which nourishes the body by means of material food, also diffuses abroad speech and thought. Our flesh renews itself of its own accord, while we are thinking about it. The olfactory organs, through which the vital air reaches the lungs, communicate all the perfumes of the world to the brain: the smell of flowers, of woods, of trees, of the sea. The ear, which enables us to communicate with our fellow men, has also allowed us to invent music, to create dreams, happiness, infinite and even physical pleasure by means of sound! But one might say that the cynical and cunning Creator wished to prohibit man from ever ennobling and idealizing his intercourse with women. Nevertheless man has found love, which is not a bad reply to that sly Deity, and he has adorned it with so much poetry that woman often forgets the sensual part of it. Those among us who are unable to deceive themselves have invented vice and refined debauchery, which is another way of laughing at God and paying homage, immodest homage, to beauty.

"But the normal man begets children just like an animal coupled with another by law.

"Look at that woman! Is it not abominable to think that such a jewel, such a pearl, born to be

beautiful, admired, fêted and adored, has spent eleven years of her life in providing heirs for the Comte de Mascaret?"

Bernard Grandin replied with a laugh: "There is a great deal of truth in all that, but very few people would understand you."

Salnis became more and more animated. "Do you know how I picture God myself?" he said. "As an enormous, creative organ beyond our ken, who scatters millions of worlds into space, just as one single fish would deposit its spawn in the sea. He creates because it is His function as God to do so, but He does not know what He is doing and is stupidly prolific in His work and is ignorant of the combinations of all kinds which are produced by His scattered germs. The human mind is a lucky little local, passing accident which was totally unforeseen, and condemned to disappear with this earth and to recommence perhaps here or elsewhere the same or different with fresh combinations of eternally new beginnings. We owe it to this little lapse of intelligence on His part that we are very uncomfortable in this world which was not made for us, which had not been prepared to receive us, to lodge and feed us or to satisfy reflecting beings, and we owe it to Him also that we have to struggle without ceasing against what are still called the designs of Providence, when we are really refined and civilized beings."

Grandin, who was listening to him attentively as he had long known the surprising outbursts of his imagination, asked him: "Then you believe that human thought is the spontaneous product of blind divine generation?"

"Naturally! A fortuitous function of the nerve

centres of our brain, like the unforeseen chemical action due to new mixtures and similar also to a charge of electricity, caused by friction or the unexpected proximity of some substance, similar to all phenomena caused by the infinite and fruitful fermentation of living matter.

"But, my dear fellow, the truth of this must be evident to any one who looks about him. If the human mind, ordained by an omniscient Creator, had been intended to be what it has become, exacting, inquiring, agitated, tormented—so different from mere animal thought and resignation—would the world which was created to receive the beings which we now are have been this unpleasant little park for small game, this salad patch, this wooded, rocky and spherical kitchen garden where your improvident Providence had destined us to live naked, in caves or under trees, nourished on the flesh of slaughtered animals, our brethren, or on raw vegetables nourished by the sun and the rain?

"But it is sufficient to reflect for a moment, in order to understand that this world was not made for such creatures as we are. Thought, which is developed by a miracle in the nerves of the cells in our brain, powerless, ignorant and confused as it is, and as it will always remain, makes all of us who are intellectual beings eternal and wretched exiles on earth.

"Look at this earth, as God has given it to those who inhabit it. Is it not visibly and solely made, planted and covered with forests for the sake of animals? What is there for us? Nothing. And for them, everything, and they have nothing to do but to eat or go hunting and eat each other, according

to their instincts, for God never foresaw gentleness and peaceable manners; He only foresaw the death of creatures which were bent on destroying and devouring each other. Are not the quail, the pigeon and the partridge the natural prey of the hawk? the sheep, the stag and the ox that of the great flesh-eating animals, rather than meat to be fattened and served up to us with truffles, which have been unearthed by pigs for our special benefit?

"As to ourselves, the more civilized, intellectual and refined we are, the more we ought to conquer and subdue that animal instinct, which represents the will of God in us. And so, in order to mitigate our lot as brutes, we have discovered and made everything, beginning with houses, then exquisite food, sauces, sweetmeats, pastry, drink, stuffs, clothes, ornaments, beds, mattresses, carriages, railways and innumerable machines, besides arts and sciences, writing and poetry. Every ideal comes from us as do all the amenities of life, in order to make our existence as simple reproducers, for which divine Providence solely intended us, less monotonous and less hard.

"Look at this theatre. Is there not here a human world created by us, unforeseen and unknown to eternal fate, intelligible to our minds alone, a sensual and intellectual distraction, which has been invented solely by and for that discontentend and restless little animal, man?

"Look at that woman, Madame de Mascaret. God intended her to live in a cave, naked or wrapped up in the skins of wild animals. But is she not better as she is? But, speaking of her, does any one know why and how her brute of a husband,

having such a companion by his side, and especially after having been boorish enough to make her a mother seven times, has suddenly left her, to run after bad women?"

Grandin replied: "Oh! my dear fellow, this is probably the only reason. He found that raising a family was becoming too expensive, and from reasons of domestic economy he has arrived at the same principles which you lay down as a philosopher."

Just then the curtain rose for the third act, and they turned round, took off their hats and sat down.

IV

The Comte and Comtesse Mascaret were sitting side by side in the carriage which was taking them home from the Opera, without speaking. But suddenly the husband said to his wife: "Gabrielle!"

"What do you want?"

"Don't you think that this has lasted long enough?"

"What?"

"The horrible punishment to which you have condemned me for the last six years?"

"What do you want? I cannot help it."

"Then tell me which of them it is."

"Never."

"Think that I can no longer see my children or feel them round me, without having my heart burdened with this doubt. Tell me which of them it is, and I swear that I will forgive you and treat it like the others."

"I have not the right to do so."

"Do you not see that I can no longer endure this

life, this thought which is wearing me out, or this question which I am constantly asking myself, this question which tortures me each time I look at them? It is driving me mad."

"Then you have suffered a great deal?" she said.

"Terribly. Should I, without that, have accepted the horror of living by your side, and the still greater horror of feeling and knowing that there is one among them whom I cannot recognize and who prevents me from loving the others?"

"Then you have really suffered very much?" she repeated.

And he replied in a constrained and sorrowful voice:

"Yes, for do I not tell you every day that it is intolerable torture to me? Should I have remained in that house, near you and them, if I did not love them? Oh! You have behaved abominably toward me. All the affection of my heart I have bestowed upon my children, and that you know. I am for them a father of the olden time, as I was for you a husband of one of the families of old, for by instinct I have remained a natural man, a man of former days. Yes, I will confess it, you have made me terribly jealous, because you are a woman of another race, of another soul, with other requirements. Oh! I shall never forget the things you said to me, but from that day I troubled myself no more about you. I did not kill you, because then I should have had no means on earth of ever discovering which of our —of your children is not mine. I have waited, but I have suffered more than you would believe, for I can no longer venture to love them, except, perhaps, the two eldest; I no longer venture to look at

them, to call them to me, to kiss them; I cannot take them on my knee without asking mystelf, 'Can it be this one?' I have been correct in my behavior toward you for six years, and even kind and complaisant. Tell me the truth, and I swear that I will do nothing unkind."

He thought, in spite of the darkness of the carriage, that he could perceive that she was moved, and feeling certain that she was going to speak at last, he said: "I beg you, I beseech you to tell me——" he said.

"I have been more guilty than you think perhaps," she replied, "but I could no longer endure that life of continual motherhood, and I had only one means of driving you from me. I lied before God and I lied, with my hand raised to my children's head, for I never have wronged you."

He seized her arm in the darkness, and squeezing it as he had done on that terrible day of their drive in the Bois de Boulogne, he stammered: "Is that true?"

"It is true."

But, wild with grief, he said with a groan: "I shall have fresh doubts that will never end! When did you lie, the last time or now? How am I to believe you at present? How can one believe a woman after that? I shall never again know what I am to think. I would rather you had said to me, 'It is Jacques or it is Jeanne.'"

The carriage drove into the courtyard of the house and when it had drawn up in front of the steps the count alighted first, as usual, and offered his wife his arm to mount the stairs. As soon as they reached the first floor he said: "May I speak to

you for a few moments longer?" And she replied, "I am quite willing."

They went into a small drawing-room and a footman, in some surprise, lighted the wax candles. As soon as he had left the room and they were alone the count continued: "How am I to know the truth? I have begged you a thousand times to speak, but you have remained dumb, impenetrable, inflexible, inexorable, and now to-day you tell me that you have been lying. For six years you have actually allowed me to believe such a thing! No, you are lying now, I do not know why, but out of pity for me, perhaps?"

She replied in a sincere and convincing manner: "If I had not done so, I should have had four more children in the last six years!"

"Can a mother speak like that?"

"Oh!" she replied, "I do not feel that I am the mother of children who never have been born; it is enough for me to be the mother of those that I have and to love them with all my heart. I am a woman of the civilized world, monsieur—we all are—and we are no longer, and we refuse to be, mere females to restock the earth."

She got up, but he seized her hands. "Only one word, Gabrielle. Tell me the truth!"

"I have just told you. I never have dishonored you."

He looked her full in the face, and how beautiful she was, with her gray eyes, like the cold sky. In her dark hair sparkled the diamond coronet, like a radiance. He suddenly felt, felt by a kind of intuition, that this grand creature was not merely a being destined to perpetuate the race, but the strange and

mysterious product of all our complicated desires which have been accumulating in us for centuries but which have been turned aside from their primitive and divine object and have wandered after a mystic, imperfectly perceived and intangible beauty. There are some women like that, who blossom only for our dreams, adorned with every poetical attribute of civilization, with that ideal luxury, coquetry and esthetic charm which surround woman, a living statue that brightens our life.

Her husband remained standing before her, stupefied at his tardy and obscure discovery, confusedly hitting on the cause of his former jealousy and understanding it all very imperfectly, and at last he said: "I believe you, for I feel at this moment that you are not lying, and before I really thought that you were."

She put out her hand to him: "We are friends then?"

He took her hand and kissed it and replied: "We are friends. Thank you, Gabrielle."

Then he went out, still looking at her, and surprised that she was still so beautiful and feeling a strange emotion arising in him.

WHO KNOWS?

GOOD God, good God! I am going to write down at last what has happened to me. But can I? Dare I? The thing is so bizarre, so inexplicable, so incomprehensible, so silly!

If I were not perfectly sure of what I have seen, sure that there was no defect in my reasoning, no error in my statements, no gap in the inflexible sequence of my observations, I should believe myself to be the dupe of a simple hallucination, the sport of a singular vision. After all, who knows?

I am at present in a private asylum, but I came here voluntarily, out of prudence and fear. Only one single human being knows my history, and that is the doctor of the asylum. I am going to write it down. I really do not know why. To get rid of it, for I feel as though it were an intolerable nightmare.

Let me explain.

I have always been a recluse, a dreamer, a kind of isolated philosopher, easy-going, content with little, harboring ill feeling against no man, and without even a grudge against heaven. I have always lived alone, because of a kind of embarrassment that affects me when I find myself in the presence of others. How can this be explained? I cannot account for it. I am not averse to society, to conversation, to dining with friends, but when they are

near me for any length of time, even the most intimate friends, they bore me, fatigue me, enervate me, and I experience an overwhelming, torturing desire to see them get up and leave, or to get up and go away myself.

That desire is more than a craving; it is an irresistible necessity. And if the presence of the people with whom I find myself were to be continued, if I were compelled, not only to listen, but also to follow, for any length of time, their conversation, something serious would assuredly happen to me. What would happen? Ah! who knows? Perhaps a slight paralytic stroke? Yes, probably!

I like so well to be alone that I cannot even endure to have other beings sleeping under my roof. I cannot live in Paris, because I there suffer the most constant agony. I die morally, and am also the victim in body and nerves of that immense crowd which swarms, which lives around me, even when it sleeps. Ah! the sleep of others is even more painful to me than their conversation. And I can never find repose when I know, when I feel, that, on the other side of a wall, other existences are interrupted by these regular eclipses of intelligence.

Why am I thus? Who knows? The cause of it is perhaps very simple. I tire very soon of everything outside of myself. There are many people in similar case.

There are on earth two distinct races: those that have need of others, whom others distract, amuse, soothe, and whom solitude harasses, exhausts, overwhelms, like the ascent of a terrible glacier, or traversing the desert; and those, on the contrary,

whom others weary, tire, bore, silently torture, while isolation calms them, bathes them with repose in their independent and fanciful imaginings. In fact, this is a normal psychic phenomenon. Some are constituted to live a life on the external; others, to live a life within themselves. As for me, my interest in externals is quickly exhausted, and as soon as it reaches its limit I experience an intolerable discomfort both of body and mind.

As a result of this, I become attached, or rather, I became much attached, to inanimate objects, which have for me the importance of actual beings, and my house has become, had become, a world in which I lived an active and solitary life, surrounded by all manner of things, furniture, familiar knick-knacks, as sympathetic in my eyes as the faces of human beings. I had filled my home with them, little by little, I had adorned it with them, and I felt contented, satisfied, happy there as one might in the arms of a charming woman, whose wonted caresses had become a soothing and delightful necessity.

I had had this house constructed in the centre of a beautiful garden which hid it from the public highway, and which was near a city where I could always find the distractions of society, for which, at moments, I had a longing. All my servants slept in a separate building which was situated at some considerable distance from the house, at the far end of the kitchen garden, which was surrounded by a high wall. The darkness of the nights, in the silence of my isolated dwelling, concealed, buried beneath the foliage of great trees, was so reposeful and so delicious, that I lingered every evening for

several hours, before retiring, in order to enjoy the solitude a little longer.

One day "Sigurd" had been played at one of the city theatres. It was the first time that I had listened to that beautiful musical and fairy-like drama, and I had derived from it the liveliest pleasure.

I returned home on foot, with a light step, my head full of sonorous phrases, and my mind haunted by delightful visions. It was black, black night, so dark that I could hardly distinguish the highway, and I stumbled into the ditch more than once. From the custom house to my house is about a mile, perhaps a little more, or a leisurely walk of about twenty minutes. It was one o'clock in the morning, or maybe half-past one; the sky had by this time cleared somewhat and the waning moon appeared, the gloomy last quarter of the moon. The first quarter of the crescent moon, which rises about five or six o'clock in the evening, is clear, gay, and with a silver sheen; but the quarter that rises after midnight is reddish, sad and fateful; it is the true witches' moon. Every night prowler must have observed this. The first quarter, though slender as a thread, throws a faint joyous light which rejoices the heart and outlines distinct shadows on the ground; the last quarter sheds scarcely a dying glimmer, and is so wan that it causes hardly any shadows.

I perceived in the distance the sombre mass of my garden, and I know not why, but I was seized with a feeling of uneasiness at the idea of going indoors. I slackened my pace. The air was very

mild. The thick clump of trees had the appearance of a tomb in which my house lay buried.

I opened the outer gate, and entered the long avenue of sycamores which leads up toward the house, their branches meeting overhead and forming a kind of tunnel, and I passed through thick, impenetrable masses of shrubbery and skirted lawns with flower beds, oval patches of various indistinct hues.

On approaching the house, I was seized by a strange feeling. I stood still. Nothing could be heard. In the trees there was not even a breath of air. "What is the matter with me?" I said to myself. For ten years I had come home in the same way, without ever experiencing the least inquietude. I never had any fear at night. The sight of a man, a marauder or a thief, would have thrown me into a fit of rage, and I would have rushed at him without any hesitation. Moreover, I was armed, I had my revolver. But I did not touch it, for I was anxious to resist that feeling of dread that was taking posession of me.

What was it? Was it a presentiment? That mysterious presentiment which takes hold of the senses of men before they see something which, to them, is inexplicable? Perhaps! Who knows?

In proportion as I advanced, I felt shivers going through me, and when I was close to the wall of my spacious residence, with its closed shutters, I felt that I must wait a few minutes before opening the door and going inside. I sat down then on a bench under the windows of my drawing-room. I rested there, a little shaky, with my head leaning against the wall, my eyes wide open under the shade of the

foliage. For the first few moments I did not observe anything unusual around me; I had a humming noise in my ears, but that is not unusual. Sometimes it seems to me that I hear trains passing, that I hear clocks ticking, that I hear a multitude on the march.

Presently those humming sounds became more distinct, more concentrated, more recognizable. I had made a mistake. It was not the ordinary buzzing of my arteries which transmitted to my ears these rumbling sounds, but it was a very distinct, though very confused noise which came, without any doubt whatever, from the interior of my house. I distinguished through the walls this continued noise, I should say agitation rather than noise, an indistinct moving about of a pile of things, as if people were tossing about, displacing, and carrying away, surreptitiously, all my furniture.

I doubted, however, for some considerable time, the evidence of my hearing. But, having placed my ear against one of the shutters, the better to discover what this strange disturbance was inside my house, I became convinced, certain, that something altogether abnormal and incomprehensible was transpiring there. I had no fear, but I was—how shall I express it?—paralyzed by astonishment. I did not draw my revolver, knowing very well that there was no need of my doing so. I listened.

I listened a long time, but could come to no conclusion, my mind being quite clear, though half crazy with anxiety. I stood there listening to the noise, which gradually increased, and at intervals grew so loud that it seemed to be an impatient, angry disturbance, a mysterious commotion.

Then, suddenly, ashamed of my timidity, I seized my bunch of keys, selected the one I wanted, guided it into the lock, turned it twice, and, pushing the door with all my might, sent it banging against the wall.

The collision sounded like the report of a gun, and in response to that explosive noise there resounded, from roof to basement of my residence, a formidable tumult. It was so sudden, so terrible, so deafening, that I recoiled a few steps, and, although I knew it to be wholly useless, I pulled my revolver out of its case.

I still waited, but only a few minutes. Now I could distinguish an extraordinary pattering upon the steps of my grand staircase, on the waxed floors, on the carpets, not of boots, nor of naked feet, but of iron, and wooden crutches, which clattered like cymbals. Then I suddenly discerned, on the threshold of my door, an armchair, my large, reading, easy chair, which walked off waddling. It went away through my garden. Other chairs followed it, those of my drawing-room, then my sofas, dragging themselves along like crocodiles on their short paws; then all my chairs, bounding like goats, and the little footstools, hopping like rabbits.

Oh! what a sensation! I slunk back into a clump of bushes where I remained crouching, watching, meanwhile, my furniture defile past, for everything walked away, the one behind the other, briskly or slowly, according to its weight or size. My piano, my grand piano, bounded past with the gallop of a horse, and a murmur of music in its sides; the smaller articles crawled along the gravel like ants, my brushes, hand mirrors, goblets, the moonlight

being reflected in them like glow-worms which glistened in the moonlight. I saw my writing-desk appear, a rare curiosity of the last century, which contained all the letters I had ever received, all the history of my heart, an old history from which I have suffered so much! Inside it there were also many photographs.

Suddenly—I no longer had any fear—I threw myself on it, seized it as one would seize a thief, as one would seize a wife about to run away; but it pursued its irresistible course, and despite my efforts, and despite my anger, I could not even retard its pace. As I was resisting in desperation that insuperable force, I was thrown to the ground in my struggle with it. It then rolled me over, trailed me along the gravel, and the rest of my furniture, which followed it, began to march over me, trampling on my legs and injuring them. When I loosed my hold, other articles passed over my body, just as a charge of cavalry does over the body of a dismounted soldier.

Seized at last with terror, I succeeded in dragging myself out of the main avenue, and in concealing myself again among the shrubbery, so as to watch the disappearance of the most cherished objects, the smallest, the least striking, the least known, which had once belonged to me.

I then heard, in the distance, in my house that now sounded hollow like all empty houses, a loud noise of slamming of doors. They were slammed shut from top to bottom of my dwelling, even the door which I had just opened myself, fool that I was, for this exodus, and which was the last to close. I fled then, running toward the city, and only

regained my self-composure on reaching the boulevards, where I met some belated people. I rang the bell of a hotel where I was known. I had knocked the dust off my clothes with my hands, and I told the porter that I had lost my bunch of keys, which included also the key of the kitchen garden, where my servants slept in a house standing by itself, on the other side of the wall of the inclosure which protected my fruits and vegetables from the raids of marauders.

I covered myself up to the eyes in the bed which was assigned to me; but I could not sleep, and I waited for dawn listening to the throbbing of my heart. I had given orders that my servants were to be summoned to the hotel at daybreak, and my *valet de chambre* knocked at my door at seven o'clock in the morning.

His countenance bore a woeful look.

"A great misfortune has happened during the night, monsieur," said he.

"What is it?"

"Somebody has stolen the whole of monsieur's furniture, all, everything, even to the smallest articles."

This news pleased me. Why? Who knows? I was complete master of myself, bent on dissimulation, resolved to tell no one of anything I had seen; determined to conceal and bury in my heart of hearts a terrible secret. I responded:

"They must be the same people who have stolen my keys. The police must be informed immediately. I am going to get up, and will rejoin you in a few moments."

The investigation into the circumstances under

which the robbery might have been committed lasted for five months. Nothing was found, not even the smallest of my knickknacks, nor the least trace of the thieves. Good gracious! If I had only told them what I knew . . . If I had said . . . they would have locked me up—me, not the thieves, but the man who had seen such a thing as I described.

Oh, I knew how to keep silence! I never refurnished my house. That would have been useless. The same thing would have occurred again. I had no desire even to re-enter the house, and I did not re-enter it; I never visited it again. I went to Paris, to the hotel, and I consulted doctors in regard to the condition of my nerves, which had disquieted me a good deal ever since that fatal night.

They advised me to travel, and I followed their advice.

II

I began by making an excursion into Italy. The sunshine did me much good. During six months I wandered about from Genoa to Venice, from Venice to Florence, from Florence to Rome, from Rome to Naples. Then I travelled over Sicily, a country celebrated for its scenery and its mounments, relics left by the Greeks and the Normans. I passed over into Africa, I traversed at my ease that immense desert, yellow and tranquil, where camels, gazelles and Arab vagabonds roam about, where, in the rare and transparent atmosphere, there hover no ghosts, either by day or night.

I returned to France by Marseilles, and in spite

of all the Provençal gaiety, the diminished clearness of the sky made me sad. I experienced, in returning to the continent, the peculiar sensation of an invalid who believes himself cured, and who is warned by a dull pain that the seeds of the disease have not been eradicated.

I then returned to Paris. At the end of a month I was very dejected. It was the autumn, and I wished, before the approach of winter, to make an excursion through Normandy, a country with which I was unfamiliar.

I began my journey with Rouen, and for eight days wandered about, charmed, captivated, enthusiastic, in that city of the middle ages, in that astounding museum of remarkable Gothic monuments.

But one afternoon, about four o'clock, as I was sauntering slowly through a seemingly unattractive street, through which there runs a stream as black as ink called "Eau de Robec," my attention, fixed for the moment on the quaint antique appearance of some of the houses, was suddenly attracted by a row of second-hand furniture shops next door to one another.

Ah! they had carefully chosen their locality, these sordid traffickers in antiquities, in that quaint little street, overlooking that sinister stream of water, beneath those pointed gables of tile and slate on which still revolved the weathercocks of bygone days.

At the farther end of these dingy shops one saw, piled up, carved chests, Rouen, Sèvres, and Moustiers china, painted statues, others of oak, Christs, Virgins, saints, church ornaments, chasubles, capes, even sacred vases, and an old gilded wooden taber-

nacle whence God had departed. Oh! What singular caverns are in those lofty houses, crowded with objects of every description, whose existence seems to be ended, things which have survived their original possessors, their century, their times, their fashion, in order to be bought as curiosities by new generations.

My affection for bibelots was awakened in that city of antiquaries. I went from shop to shop, crossing, in two strides, the rotten four-plank bridges thrown over the nauseous current of the Eau de Robec.

Heaven protect me! What a shock! One of my most beautiful wardrobes was suddenly descried by me, at the entrance to an archway, which was crowded with articles of every description and which seemed to be the entrance to the catacombs of a cemetery of ancient furniture. I approached my wardrobe, trembling in every limb, trembling to such an extent that I dared not touch it. I put forth my hand, I hesitated. It was indeed my wardrobe, nevertheless; a unique wardrobe of the time of Louis XIII, recognizable by any one who had seen it only once. Casting my eyes suddenly a little farther, toward the more sombre depths of this corridor, I perceived three of my tapestry-covered chairs; and farther on still, my two Henry II tables, such rare treasures that people came all the way from Paris to see them.

Think! only think in what a state of mind I now was! I advanced, haltingly, quivering with emotion, but I advanced, for I am brave, I advanced as a knight of the dark ages would enter an enchanted cave.

I found, at every step, something that belonged to me; my brushes, my books, my pictures, my draperies, my firearms, everything, except the writing-desk full of my letters, and that I could not discover.

I walked on, descending dark passages, in order to ascend again to the floors above. I was alone, I called out, nobody answered, I was alone; there was no one in that house—a house as vast and torturous as a labyrinth.

Night came on, and I was compelled to sit down in the darkness on one of my own chairs, for I had no desire to go away. From time to time I shouted, "Hullo, hullo, somebody!"

I had sat there, certainly, for more than an hour when I heard steps, steps soft and slow, I knew not where. My impulse was to make my escape; but, bracing myself up, I called out again, whereupon I perceived a glimmer of light in the adjoining room.

"Who is there?" said a voice.

"A buyer," I responded.

"It is pretty late to come into a shop in that manner."

"I have been waiting for you for more than an hour," I answered.

"You can come back to-morrow."

"To-morrow I shall have left Rouen."

I dared not advance, and he did not come to me. I saw still the glimmer of his light, which shone on a tapestry on which were two angels flying over the dead on a field of battle. It belonged to me also. I said:

"Well, are you coming?"

"I am at your service," he answered.

I got up and went toward him.

Standing in the centre of a large room was a little man, very short and very fat, phenomenally fat, a hideous object.

He had a singuler beard of straggling yellowish hair, and not a hair on his head. Not a hair!

As he held his candle aloft at arm's length in order to see me, his cranium appeared to me to resemble a little moon, in that vast chamber encumbered with old furniture. His features were wrinkled and puffy, and his eyes could not be seen.

I bought three chairs which belonged to me, and paid at once a large sum for them, givng him merely the number of my room at the hotel. They were to be delivered the next day before nine o'clock.

I then started off. He conducted me, with much politeness, as far as the door.

I immediately repaired to the chief commissary of police, to whom I told the story of the robbery of my furniture and of the discovery I had just made. He required time to telegraph to the authorities who originally had charge of the case, for information, and begged me to wait in his office until he received a reply. An hour later, the answer came and bore out my statements.

"I am going to arrest and interrogate this man at once," he said to me, "for he may have conceived some sort of suspicion, and smuggled away what belongs to you. Will you go and dine and return in two hours? I shall then have the man here, and I will subject him to a fresh interrogation in your presence."

"Most gladly, monsieur. I thank you with all my heart."

I went to dine at my hotel and ate better than I could have believed possible. I was quite happy now; "they've got him," I thought.

Two hours later I returned to the office of the police functionary, who was waiting for me.

"Well, monsieur," said he, on perceiving me, "we have not been able to find your man. My agents cannot put their hands on him."

"Ah!" I felt myself sinking. "But—you have at least found his house?" I asked.

"Yes, certainly; and what is more, it is now being watched and guarded until his return. As for him, he has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, disappeared. He ordinarily passes his evenings at the house of a female neighbor, who is also a furniture broker, a queer sort of sorceress, the widow Bidoin. She has not seen him this evening and cannot give any information in regard to him. We must wait until to-morrow."

I went away. Ah! how sinister the streets of Rouen seemed to me, how distressing and haunted!

I slept so badly that I had a fit of nightmare every time I went off to sleep.

As I did not wish to appear too restless or eager, I waited till ten o'clock the next day before reporting to the police.

The merchant had not reappeared. His shop remained closed.

The commissary said to me:

"I have taken all the necessary steps. The court has been made acquainted with the affair. We will go together to that shop and have it

opened, and you shall point out to me all that belongs to you."

We drove there in a cab. Police officers were stationed at the building with a locksmith, and the door of the shop was soon opened.

On entering, I could not discover my wardrobes, my chairs, my tables; I saw nothing, nothing of that which had furnished my house, no, nothing, although on the previous evening, I could not take a step without encountering something that belonged to me.

The chief commissary, much astonished, regarded me at first with suspicion.

"My God, monsieur," said I to him, "the disappearance of these articles of furniture coincides strangely with that of the merchant."

He laughed.

"That is true. You did wrong in buying and paying for the articles which were your own property yesterday. It was that that gave him the cue."

"What seems to me incomprehensible," I replied, "is that all the places that were occupied by my furniture are now filled by other furniture."

"Oh!" responded the commissary, "he has had all night, and has no doubt been assisted by accomplices. This house must communicate with the adjoining houses. But have no fear, monsieur; I will have the affair promptly and thoroughly investigated. The brigand shall not escape us for long, seeing that we are in charge of his den."

Ah! My heart, my heart, my poor heart, how it beat!

I remained a fortnight at Rouen. The man did

not return. Heavens! good heavens! That man, what was it that could have frightened or surprised him?

But on the sixteenth day, early in the morning, I received from my gardener, now the keeper of my empty and pillaged house, the following strange letter:

'MONSIEUR:

"I have the honor to inform monsieur that there happened something the evening before last which nobody can understand, and the police no more than the rest of us. The whole of the furniture has been returned, not one piece is missing—everything is in its place, up to the very smallest article. The house is now the same in every respect as it was before the robbery took place. It is enough to make one lose one's head. The thing took place during the night between Friday and Saturday. The roads are torn up as though everything had been dragged along from the gate to the door of the house. The same thing was observed the day after the disappearance of the furniture.

"We are anxiously expecting monsieur, whose very humble and obedient servant I am,

"RAUDIN, PHILIPPE."

"Ah! no, no, ah! never, never, ah! no. I shall never return there."

I took the letter to the commissary of police.

"It is a very clever restitution," said he. "Let us say nothing about it. We shall catch the man one of these days."

But he has never been caught. No. They have not caught him, and I am afraid of him now, as though he were a ferocious animal that had been let loose behind me.

Not to be found! Not to be found, this monster with the moon skull. They will never find him. He will never return to his shop. What does he care! I am the only one who may meet him, and I do not wish to do so.

I do not wish it! I do not wish it! I do not wish it!

And if he returns, if he takes possession of his shop, who is to prove that my furniture was on his premises? There is only my testimony against him; and I feel that that is not above suspicion.

Ah! no! That kind of existence was no longer possible. I was not able to keep the secret of what I had witnessed. I could not continue to live like the rest of the world, with the fear upon me that those scenes might be re-enacted.

I came to consult the doctor who directs this lunatic asylum, and I told him everything.

After he had interrogated me for a long time, he said to me:

"Will you consent, monsieur, to remain here for some time?"

"Most willingly, monsieur."

"You have some means?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you have isolated apartments?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Would you care to receive any friends?"

"No, monsieur, no, nobody. The man from Rouen might take it into his head to pursue me here to be revenged on me."

And I have been alone, alone, all, all alone, for three months. I am growing tranquil by degrees. I have no longer any fears. If the antiquary should become insane . . . and if he should be brought into this asylum! Even prisons themselves are not places of safety.

WAS IT A DREAM?

"I LOVED her madly! Why does one love? Why does one love? How strange it is to see but one being in the world, to have but one thought in one's mind, one desire in the heart, and one name on the lips; a name that comes up continually, rising from the depths of the soul like water in a spring, and which one repeats over and over again, and murmurs ceaselessly everywhere, like a prayer.

"I am not going to tell you our story. Love is always the same. I met her and loved her; that is all. And for a whole year I lived in her tenderness, her caresses, in her arms, hung on her words and looks, loved her dresses, was so completely wrapped up, bound, imprisoned in everything that pertained to her that I no longer knew whether it was day or night, if I was dead or alive, on this old earth of ours or elsewhere.

"And then she died. How? I do not know; I no longer know. But one evening she came home wet, for it was raining heavily, and the next day she coughed, and she coughed for about a week, and took to her bed. What happened I do not remember now; but doctors came, wrote prescriptions, and went away. Medicines were brought, and a woman made her drink them. Her hands were hot, her forehead was burning, and her eyes bright and

sad. When I spoke to her she answered me, but I do not remember what we said. I have forgotten everything, everything, everything! She died, and I very well remember her little faint sigh—her last. The nurse said 'Ah!' and I understood, I understood!

"I knew nothing more, nothing. I saw a priest, who said: "Your sweetheart?" and it seemed to me as if he were insulting her. As she was dead, nobody had the right to know our relationship, and I turned him out. Another came who was very kind and tender, and I shed tears when he spoke to me about her.

"They consulted me about the funeral, but I do not remember anything that they said, though I distinctly recall the coffin and the strokes of the hammer as they nailed her down in it. Oh! God, God!

"She was buried! Buried! She! In that hole! Some people came—female friends. I made my escape, and ran away; I ran, and then I walked, through the streets, and finally went home. The next day I started on a journey.

* * * * * * * *

"Yesterday I returned to Paris, and when I saw my room again—our room, our bed, our furniture, everything that remains of the life of a human being after death—I was seized by such a violent recurrence of grief that I came very near opening the window and throwing myself out into the street. As I could no longer remain in the midst of these things, between these walls which had inclosed and sheltered her, and which retained a thousand atoms of her, of her skin and of her breath, in their imper-

ceptible crevices, I took up my hat to make my escape, and just as I reached the door I passed the large glass in the hall, which she had put there so that she could look at herself every day from head to foot as she went out, to see if her toilet was in order, and was correct and pretty, from her little boots to her hat.

"And I stopped short in front of that looking-glass in which she had so often been reflected—so often, so often that it also must have retained her reflection. I was standing there, trembling, with my eyes fixed on the glass—on that flat, profound, empty glass—which had contained her entirely, and had possessed her as much as I had, as my passionate looks had. I felt as if I loved that glass. I touched it; it was cold. Oh, the recollection! Sorrowful mirror, burning mirror, live mirror, horrible mirror, which makes us suffer such torments! Happy are the men whose heart is like a mirror where images glide and pass away; that forgets all it has contained, reflected, all that have basked in its love and affection! But I, how I suffer!

"I went out and, without knowing it, without wishing it, walked to the cemetery. I found her simple grave, a white marble cross, with these few words:

"*'She loved, was beloved, and died.'*

"She was there, beneath the ground, decomposed! How horrible! I sobbed, with my forehead to the ground. I remained there a long time, a long time. Then I saw that it was getting dark, and a strange, mad wish, the desire of a despairing lover, seized me. I wished to pass the night, the last night, in weeping on her grave. But I should be

seen and driven out. How was I to manage? I was cunning, so I got up and began to roam about that city of the dead. I walked and walked. How small this city is, in comparison with the other, the city in which we live! And yet, how much more numerous the dead are than the living. We require high houses, wide streets, and much room for the four generations who see the daylight at the same time, drink water from the spring, wine from the vines, and eat the bread from the plains.

"And for all the generations of the dead, for all that ladder of humanity that has descended to us, there is scarcely anything, only a field, scarcely anything! The earth takes them back, oblivion effaces them. Adieu!

"At the end of this cemetery I suddenly perceived the abandoned cemetery where the dead have long since blended with the soil, where the crosses themselves decay, where the last comers will be put to-morrow. It is full of untended roses, of robust, dark cypress trees, a sad and beautiful garden, nourished on human flesh.

"I was alone, perfectly alone. I hid in a leafy tree, and concealed myself completely among the thick and sombre branches, and waited, clinging to the trunk, as a shipwrecked man does to a plank.

"When it was quite dark I left my refuge and began to walk softly, slowly, noiselessly through that ground full of dead people, and I wandered about for a long time, but could not find her again. I went on with extended arms, knocking against the tombs with my hands, my feet, my knees, my chest, even with my head, without being able to find her. I touched and felt about like a blind man groping

his way. I felt the stones, the crosses, the iron railings, the metal wreaths, and the wreaths of faded flowers! I read the names with my fingers, by passing them over the letters. What a night! What a night! I could not find her again!

"There was no moon. What a night! I was afraid, horribly afraid in these narrow paths, between two rows of graves. Graves! graves! graves! nothing but graves! On my right, on my left, in front of me, around me, everywhere there were graves! I sat down on one of them, for I could not walk any longer, my knees were so weak. I could hear my heart beat! And I could hear something else as well. What? A confused, nameless noise. Was the noise in my head, in the impenetrable night, or beneath the mysterious earth, the earth sown with human corpses? I looked about me, but I cannot say how long I remained there; I was paralyzed with terror, drunk with fright, ready to shout out, ready to die.

"Suddenly it seemed to me as if the slab of marble on which I was sitting was moving. Certainly it was moving, as if it were being raised. With a bound I sprang on to the neighboring tomb, and I saw, yes, I distinctly saw the stone which I had just left standing upright, and the dead person appeared, a naked skeleton, that was pushing the stone back with its bent back. I saw it quite clearly, although the night was so dark. On the cross I could read:

"*'Here lies Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He loved his family, was kind and honorable, and died in the peace of the Lord.'*

"The dead man also read what was inscribed on

his tombstone; then he picked up a stone off the path, a little, pointed stone, and began to scrape the letters carefully. He slowly effaced them altogether, and with the hollows of his eyes he looked at the places where they had been engraved, and, with the tip of the bone that had been his forefinger he wrote in luminous letters, like those lines which one traces on walls with the tip of a lucifer match:

"'*Here reposes Jacques Olivant, who died at the age of fifty-one. He hastened his father's death by his unkindness, as he wished to inherit his fortune; he tortured his wife, tormented his children, deceived his neighbors, robbed every one he could, and died wretched.*'

"When he had finished writing the dead man stood motionless, looking at his work, and on turning round I saw that all the graves were open, that all the dead bodies had emerged from them, and that all had effaced the lies inscribed on the gravestones by their relations, and had substituted the truth instead. And I saw that all had been the tormentors of their neighbors—malicious, dishonest, hypocrites, liars, rogues, calumniators, envious; that they had stolen, deceived, performed every disgraceful, every abominable action, these good fathers, these faithful wives, these devoted sons, these chaste young girls, these honest tradesmen, these men and women who were called irreproachable. And they were all writing at the same time, on the threshold of their eternal abode, the truth, the cruel, terrible, and holy truth which every one on earth is ignorant of, or pretends to ignore.

"I thought that *she* also must have written something on her tombstone, and now, running

without any fear among the half-open coffins, among the corpses and skeletons, I went toward her, sure that I should find her immediately. I recognized her at once, without seeing her face, which was covered by the winding sheet, and on the marble cross, where shortly before I had read: *'She loved, was beloved, and died,'* I now read: *'Having gone out one day, in order to deceive her lover, she caught cold in the rain and died.'*

"It appears that they found me at daybreak lying on the grave unconscious."

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED

ONE autumn I went to spend the hunting season with some friends in a château in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical jokes. I do not care to know people who are not.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once awakened suspicion in my mind. They fired off rifles, embraced me, made much of me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

"Look out, old ferret! They have something in store for you."

During the dinner the mirth was excessive, exaggerated, in fact. I thought: "Here are people who have more than their share of amusement, and apparently without reason. They must have planned some good joke. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!"

During the entire evening every one laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I scented a practical joke in the air, as a dog scents game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word, or a meaning, or a gesture escape me. Every one seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour struck for retiring, and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why?

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED

They called to me: "Good-night." I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance round the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the keyhole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out and leave me in darkness."

Then I went across to the mantelpiece and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that I cast another glance around me without discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article, one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from outside.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, the night was advancing; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was foolish. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing immoderately at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure.

All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower both from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking to the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I considered insured safety. I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it toward me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bedclothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bedclothes.

For at least another hour I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the château. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top of my own, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down, almost deafened me.

I was smothering beneath the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whis-

kers. Then, with all my strength, I launched out a blow at this face. But I immediately received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my nightshirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.

Oh, heavens! it was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into my apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor and fallen on his stomach, spilling my breakfast over my face in spite of himself.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the practical joke I had been trying to avoid.

Oh, how they all laughed that day!

FORGIVENESS

SHE had been brought up in one of those families who live entirely to themselves, apart from all the rest of the world. Such families know nothing of political events, although they are discussed at table; for changes in the Government take place at such a distance from them that they are spoken of as one speaks of a historical event, such as the death of Louis XVI or the landing of Napoleon.

Customs are modified in course of time, fashions succeed one another, but such variations are taken no account of in the placid family circle where traditional usages prevail year after year. And if some scandalous episode or other occurs in the neighborhood, the disreputable story dies a natural death when it reaches the threshold of the house. The father and mother may, perhaps, exchange a few words on the subject when alone together some evening, but they speak in hushed tones—for even walls have ears. The father says, with bated breath:

"You've heard of that terrible affair in the Rivoil family?"

And the mother answers:

"Who would have dreamed of such a thing? It's dreadful."

The children suspected nothing, and arrive in their

turn at years of discretion with eyes and mind blindfolded, ignorant of the real side of life, not knowing that people do not think as they speak, and do not speak as they act; or aware that they should live at war, or at all events, in a state of armed peace, with the rest of mankind; not suspecting the fact that the simple are always deceived, the sincere made sport of, the good maltreated.

Some go on till the day of their death in this blind probity and loyalty and honor, so pure-minded that nothing can open their eyes.

Others, undeceived, but without fully understanding, make mistakes, are dismayed, and become desperate, believing themselves the playthings of a cruel fate, the wretched victims of adverse circumstances, and exceptionally wicked men.

The Savignols married their daughter Bertha at the age of eighteen. She wedded a young Parisian, George Baron by name, who had dealings on the Stock Exchange. He was handsome, well-mannered, and apparently all that could be desired. But in the depths of his heart he somewhat despised his old-fashioned parents-in-law, whom he spoke of among his intimates as "my dear old fossils."

He belonged to a good family, and the girl was rich. They settled down in Paris.

She became one of those provincial Parisians whose name is legion. She remained in complete ignorance of the great city, of its social side, its pleasures and its customs—just as she remained ignorant also of life, its perfidy and its mysteries.

Devoted to her house, she knew scarcely anything beyond her own street; and when she ventured into another part of Paris it seemed to her that she had

accomplished a long and arduous journey into some unknown, unexplored city. She would then say to her husband in the evening:

"I have been through the boulevards to-day."

Two or three times a year her husband took her to the theatre. These were events the remembrance of which never grew dim; they provided subjects of conversation for long afterward.

Sometimes three months afterward she would suddenly burst into laughter, and exclaim:

"Do you remember that actor dressed up as a general, who crowed like a cock?"

Her friends were limited to two families related to her own. She spoke of them as "the Martinets" and "the Michelins."

Her husband lived as he pleased, coming home when it suited him—sometimes not until dawn—alleging business, but not putting himself out overmuch to account for his movements, well aware that no suspicion would ever enter his wife's guileless soul.

But one morning she received an anonymous letter.

She was thunderstruck—too simple-minded to understand the infamy of unsigned information and to despise the letter, the writer of which declared himself inspired by interest in her happiness, hatred of evil, and love of truth.

This missive told her that her husband had had, for two years past, a sweetheart, a young widow named Madame Rosset, with whom he spent all his evenings.

Bertha knew neither how to dissemble her grief nor how to spy on her husband. When he came

in for lunch she threw the letter down before him, burst into tears, and fled to her room.

He had time to take in the situation and to prepare his reply. He knocked at his wife's door. She opened it at once, but dared not look at him. He smiled, sat down, drew her to his knee, and in a tone of light raillery began:

"My dear child, as a matter of fact, I have a friend named Madame Rosset, whom I have known for the last ten years, and of whom I have a very high opinion. I may add that I know scores of other people whose names I have never mentioned to you, seeing that you do not care for society, or fresh acquaintances, or functions of any sort. But, to make short work of such vile accusations as this, I want you to put on your things after lunch, and we'll go together and call on this lady, who will very soon become a friend of yours, too, I am quite sure."

She embraced her husband warmly, and, moved by that feminine spirit of curiosity which will not be lulled once it is aroused, consented to go and see this unknown widow, of whom she was, in spite of everything, just the least bit jealous. She felt instinctively that to know a danger is to be already armed against it.

She entered a small, tastefully furnished flat on the fourth floor of an attractive house. After waiting five minutes in a drawing-room rendered somewhat dark by its many curtains and hangings, a door opened, and a very dark, short, rather plump young woman appeared, surprised and smiling.

George introduced them:

"My wife—Madame Julie Rosset."

The young widow uttered a half-suppressed cry

of astonishment and joy, and ran forward with hands outstretched. She had not hoped, she said, to have this pleasure, knowing that Madame Baron never saw any one, but she was delighted to make her acquaintance. She was so fond of George (she said "George" in a familiar, sisterly sort of way) that she had been most anxious to know his young wife and to make friends with her, too.

By the end of a month the two new friends were inseparable. They saw each other every day, sometimes twice a day, and dined together every evening, sometimes at one house, sometimes at the other. George no longer deserted his home, no longer talked of pressing business. He adored his own fireside, he said.

When, after a time, a flat in the house where Madame Rosset lived became vacant Madame Baron hastened to take it, in order to be near her friend and spend even more time with her than hitherto.

And for two whole years their friendship was without a cloud, a friendship of heart and mind—absolute, tender, devoted. Bertha could hardly speak without bringing in Julie's name. To her Madame Rosset represented perfection.

She was utterly happy, calm and contented.

But Madame Rosset fell ill. Bertha hardly left her side. She spent her nights with her, distracted with grief; even her husband seemed inconsolable.

One morning the doctor, after leaving the invalid's bedside, took George and his wife aside, and told them that he considered Julie's condition very grave.

As soon as he had gone the grief-stricken husband and wife sat down opposite each other and

gave way to tears. That night they both sat up with the patient. Bertha tenderly kissed her friend from time to time, while George stood at the foot of the bed, his eyes gazing steadfastly on the invalid's face.

The next day she was worse.

But toward evening she declared she felt better, and insisted that her friends should go back to their own apartment to dinner.

They were sitting sadly in the dining-room, scarcely even attempting to eat, when the maid gave George a note. He opened it, turned pale as death, and, rising from the table, said to his wife in a constrained voice:

"Wait for me. I must leave you a moment. I shall be back in ten minutes. Don't go away on any account."

And he hurried to his room to get his hat.

Bertha waited for him, a prey to fresh anxiety. But, docile in everything, she would not go back to her friend till he returned.

At length, as he did not reappear, it occurred to her to visit his room and see if he had taken his gloves. This would show whether or not he had had a call to make.

She saw them at the first glance. Beside them lay a crumpled paper, evidently thrown down in haste.

She recognized it at once as the note George had received.

And a burning temptation, the first that had ever assailed her, urged her to read it and discover the cause of her husband's abrupt departure. Her rebellious conscience protested but a devouring and

fearful curiosity prevailed. She seized the paper, smoothed it out, recognized the tremulous, penciled writing as Julie's, and read:

"Come alone and kiss me, my poor dear. I am dying."

At first she did not understand, the idea of Julie's death being her uppermost thought. But all at once the true meaning of what she read burst in a flash upon her; this penciled note threw a lurid light upon her whole existence, revealed the whole infamous truth, all the treachery and perfidy of which she had been the victim. She understood the long years of deceit, the way in which she had been made their puppet. She saw them again, sitting side by side in the evening, reading by lamplight out of the same book, glancing at each other at the end of each page.

And her poor, indignant, suffering, bleeding heart was cast into the depths of a despair which knew no bounds.

Footsteps drew near; she fled, and shut herself in her own room.

Presently her husband called her:

"Come quickly! Madame Rosset is dying."

Bertha appeared at her door, and with trembling lips replied:

"Go back to her alone; she does not need me."

He looked at her stupidly, dazed with grief, and repeated:

"Come at once! She's dying, I tell you!"

Bertha answered:

"You would rather it were I."

Then at last he understood, and returned alone to the dying woman's bedside.

He mourned her openly, shamelessly, indifferent

to the sorrow of the wife who no longer spoke to him, no longer looked at him; who passed her life in solitude, hedged round with disgust, with indignant anger, and praying night and day to God.

They still lived in the same house, however, and sat opposite each other at table, in silence and despair.

Gradually his sorrow grew less acute; but she did not forgive him.

And so their life went on, hard and bitter for them both.

For a whole year they remained as complete strangers to each other as if they had never met. Bertha nearly lost her reason.

At last one morning she went out very early, and returned about eight o'clock bearing in her hands an enormous bouquet of white roses.

And she sent word to her husband that she wanted to speak to him.

He came—anxious and uneasy.

"We are going out together," she said. "Please carry these flowers; they are too heavy for me."

A carriage took them to the gate of the cemetery, where they alighted. Then, her eyes filling with tears, she said to George:

"Take me to her grave."

He trembled, and could not understand her motive; but he led the way, still carrying the flowers. At last he stopped before a white marble slab, to which he pointed without a word.

She took the bouquet from him, and, kneeling down, placed it on the grave. Then she offered up a silent, heartfelt prayer.

Behind her stood her husband, overcome by recollections of the past.

She rose, and held out her hands to him.

"If you wish it, we will be friends," she said.

THE WOLF

THIS is what the old Marquis d'Arville told us after St. Hubert's dinner at the house of the Baron des Ravels.

We had killed a stag that day. The marquis was the only one of the guests who had not taken part in this chase. He never hunted.

During that long repast we had talked about hardly anything but the slaughter of animals. The ladies themselves were interested in bloody and exaggerated tales, and the orators imitated the attacks and the combats of men against beasts, raised their arms, romanced in a thundering voice.

M. d'Arville talked well, in a certain flowery, high-sounding, but effective style. He must have told this story frequently, for he told it fluently, never hesitating for words, choosing them with skill to make his description vivid.

Gentlemen, I have never hunted, neither did my father, nor my grandfather, nor my great-grandfather. This last was the son of a man who hunted more than all of you put together. He died in 1764. I will tell you the story of his death.

His name was Jean. He was married, father of that child who became my great-grandfather, and he lived with his younger brother, François d'Arville, in our castle in Lorraine, in the midst of the forest.

THE WOLF

François d'Arville had remained a bachelor for love of the chase.

They both hunted from one end of the year to the other, without stopping and seemingly without fatigue. They loved only hunting, understood nothing else, talked only of that, lived only for that.

They had at heart that one passion, which was terrible and inexorable. It consumed them, had completely absorbed them, leaving room for no other thought.

They had given orders that they should not be interrupted in the chase for any reason whatever. My great-grandfather was born while his father was following a fox, and Jean d'Arville did not stop the chase, but exclaimed: "The deuce! The rascal might have waited till after the view-halloo!"

His brother François was still more infatuated. On rising he went to see the dogs, then the horses, then he shot little birds about the castle until the time came to hunt some large game.

In the countryside they were called M. le Marquis and M. le Cadet, the nobles then not being at all like the chance nobility of our time, which wishes to establish an hereditary hierarchy in titles; for the son of a marquis is no more a count, nor the son of a viscount a baron, than a son of a general is a colonel by birth. But the contemptible vanity of to-day finds profit in that arrangement.

My ancestors were unusually tall, bony, hairy, violent and vigorous. The younger, still taller than the older, had a voice so strong that, according to a legend of which he was proud, all the leaves of the forest shook when he shouted.

When they were both mounted to set out hunting,

it must have been a superb sight to see those two giants straddling their huge horses.

Now, toward the midwinter of that year, 1764, the frosts were excessive, and the wolves became ferocious.

They even attacked belated peasants, roamed at night outside the houses, howled from sunset to sunrise, and robbed the stables.

And soon a rumor began to circulate. People talked of a colossal wolf with gray fur, almost white, who had eaten two children, gnawed off a woman's arm, strangled all the watch dogs in the district, and even come without fear into the farmyards. The people in the houses affirmed that they had felt his breath, and that it made the flame of the lights flicker. And soon a panic ran through all the province. No one dared go out any more after nightfall. The darkness seemed haunted by the image of the beast.

The brothers d'Arville determined to find and kill him, and several times they brought together all the gentlemen of the country to a great hunt.

They beat the forests and searched the coverts in vain; they never met him. They killed wolves, but not that one. And every night after a *battue* the beast, as if to avenge himself, attacked some traveller or killed some one's cattle, always far from the place where they had looked for him.

Finally, one night he stole into the pigpen of the Château d'Arville and ate the two fattest pigs.

The brothers were roused to anger, considering this attack as a direct insult and a defiance. They took their strong bloodhounds, used to pursue dan-

gerous animals, and they set off to hunt, their hearts filled with rage.

From dawn until the hour when the empurpled sun descended behind the great naked trees, they beat the woods without finding anything.

At last, furious and disgusted, both were returning, walking their horses along a lane bordered with hedges, and they marvelled that their skill as huntsmen should be baffled by this wolf, and they were suddenly seized with a mysterious fear.

The elder said:

"That beast is not an ordinary one. You would say it had a mind like a man."

The younger answered:

"Perhaps we should have a bullet blessed by our cousin, the bishop, or pray some priest to pronounce the words which are needed."

Then they were silent.

Jean continued:

"Look how red the sun is. The great wolf will do some harm to-night."

He had hardly finished speaking when his horse reared; that of François began to kick. A large thicket covered with dead leaves opened before them, and a mammoth beast, entirely gray, jumped up and ran off through the wood.

Both uttered a kind of grunt of joy, and bending over the necks of their heavy horses, they threw them forward with an impulse from all their body, hurling them on at such a pace, urging them, hurrying them away, exciting them so with voice and with gesture and with spur that the experienced riders seemed to be carrying the heavy beasts between

their thighs and to bear them off as if they were flying.

Thus they went, plunging through the thickets, dashing across the beds of streams, climbing the hillsides, descending the gorges, and blowing the horn as loud as they could to attract their people and the dogs.

And now, suddenly, in that mad race, my ancestor struck his forehead against an enormous branch which split his skull; and he fell dead on the ground, while his frightened horse took himself off, disappearing in the gloom which enveloped the woods.

The younger d'Arville stopped quick, leaped to the earth, seized his brother in his arms, and saw that the brains were escaping from the wound with the blood.

Then he sat down beside the body, rested the head, disfigured and red, on his knees, and waited, regarding the immobile face of his elder brother. Little by little a fear possessed him, a strange fear which he had never felt before, the fear of the dark, the fear of loneliness, the fear of the deserted wood, and the fear also of the weird wolf who had just killed his brother to avenge himself upon them both.

The gloom thickened; the acute cold made the trees crack. François got up, shivering, unable to remain there longer, feeling himself growing faint. Nothing was to be heard, neither the voice of the dogs nor the sound of the horns—all was silent along the invisible horizon; and this mournful silence of the frozen night had something about it terrific and strange.

He seized in his immense hands the great body of

Jean, straightened it, and laid it across the saddle to carry it back to the château; then he went on his way softly, his mind troubled as if he were in a stupor, pursued by horrible and fear-giving images.

And all at once, in the growing darkness a great shape crossed his path. It was the beast. A shock of terror shook the hunter; something cold, like a drop of water, seemed to glide down his back, and, like a monk haunted of the devil, he made a great sign of the cross, dismayed at this abrupt return of the horrible prowler. But his eyes fell again on the inert body before him, and passing abruptly from fear to anger, he shook with an indescribable rage.

Then he spurred his horse and rushed after the wolf.

He followed it through the copses, the ravines, and the tall trees, traversing woods which he no longer recognized, his eyes fixed on the white speck which fled before him through the night.

His horse also seemed animated by a force and strength hitherto unknown. It galloped straight ahead with outstretched neck, striking against trees, and rocks, the head and the feet of the dead man thrown across the saddle. The limbs tore out his hair; the brow, beating the huge trunks, spattered them with blood; the spurs tore their ragged coats of bark. Suddenly the beast and the horseman issued from the forest and rushed into a valley, just as the moon appeared above the mountains. The valley here was stony, inclosed by enormous rocks.

François then uttered a yell of joy which the echoes repeated like a peal of thunder, and he leaped from his horse, his cutlass in his hand.

The beast, with bristling hair, the back arched, awaited him, its eyes gleaming like two stars. But, before beginning battle, the strong hunter, seizing his brother, seated him on a rock, and, placing stones under his head, which was no more than a mass of blood, he shouted in the ears as if he was talking to a deaf man: "Look, Jean; look at this!"

Then he attacked the monster. He felt himself strong enough to overturn a mountain, to bruise stones in his hands. The beast tried to bite him, aiming for his stomach; but he had seized the fierce animal by the neck, without even using his weapon, and he strangled it gently, listening to the cessation of breathing in its throat and the beatings of its heart. He laughed, wild with joy, pressing closer and closer his formidable embrace, crying in a delirium of joy, "Look, Jean, look!" All resistance ceased; the body of the wolf became limp. He was dead.

François took him up in his arms and carried him to the feet of the elder brother, where he laid him, repeating, in a tender voice: "There, there, there, my little Jean, see him!"

Then he replaced on the saddle the two bodies, one upon the other, and rode away.

He returned to the château, laughing and crying, like Gargantua at the birth of Pantagruel, uttering shouts of triumph, and boisterous with joy as he related the death of the beast, and grieving and tearing his beard in telling of that of his brother.

And often, later, when he talked again of that day, he would say, with tears in his eyes: "If only poor Jean could have seen me strangle the beast, he would have died content, that I am sure!"

The widow of my ancestor inspired her orphan son with that horror of the chase which has transmitted itself from father to son as far down as myself.

The Marquis d'Arville was silent. Some one asked:

"That story is a legend, isn't it?"

And the story teller answered:

"I swear to you that it is true from beginning to end."

Then a lady declared, in a little, soft voice:

"All the same, it is fine to have passions like that."

OLD MONGILET

IN the office old Mongilet was considered a type. He was a good old employé, who had never been outside Paris but once in his life.

It was the end of July, and each of us, every Sunday, went to roll in the grass, or soak in the water in the country near by. Asnières, Argenteuil, Chatou, Bougival, Maisons, Poissy, had their habitués and their ardent admirers. We argued about the merits and advantages of all these places, celebrated and delightful to all Parsian employés.

Daddy Mongilet declared:

"You are like a lot of sheep! It must be pretty, this country you talk of!"

"Well, how about you, Mongilet? Don't you ever go on an excursion?"

"Yes, indeed. I go in an omnibus. When I have had a good luncheon, without any hurry, at the wine shop down there, I look up my route with a plan of Paris, and the time table of the lines and connections. And then I climb up on the box, open my umbrella and off we go. Oh, I see lots of things, more than you, I bet! I change my surroundings. It is as though I were taking a journey across the world, the people are so different in one street and another. I know my Paris better than anyone. And then, there is nothing more amusing than the entresols. You would not believe what one sees in

there at a glance. One guesses at domestic scenes simply at sight of the face of a man who is roaring; one is amused on passing by a barber's shop, to see the barber leave his customer whose face is covered with lather to look out in the street. One exchanges heartfelt glances with the milliners just for fun, as one has no time to alight. Ah, how many things one sees!

"It is the drama, the real, the true, the drama of nature, seen as the horses trot by. Heavens! I would not give my excusions in the omnibus for all your stupid excursions in the woods."

"Come and try it, Mongilet, come to the country once just to see."

"I was there once," he replied, "twenty years ago, and you will never catch me there again."

"Tell us about it, Mongilet."

"If you wish to hear it. This is how it was: You knew Boivin, the old editorial clerk, whom we called Boileau?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"He was my office chum. The rascal had a house at Colombes and always invited me to spend Sunday with him. He would say:

" 'Come along, Maculotte [he called me Maculotte for fun]. You will see what a nice excursion we will take.'

"I let myself be entrapped like an animal, and set out, one morning by the 8 o'clock train. I arrived at a kind of town, a country town where there is nothing to see, and I at length found my way to an old wooden door with an iron bell, at the end of an alley between two walls.

"I rang, and waited a long time, and at last

the door was opened. What was it that opened it? I could not tell at the first glance. A woman or an ape? The creature was old, ugly, covered with old clothes that looked dirty and wicked. It had chicken's feathers in its hair and looked as though it would devour me.

"'What do you want?' she said.

"'Mr. Boivin.'

"'What do you want of him, of Mr. Boivin?'

"I felt ill at ease on being questioned by this fury. I stammered: 'Why—he expects me.'

"'Ah, it is you who have come to luncheon?'

"'Yes,' I stammered, trembling.

"Then, turning toward the house, she cried in an angry tone:

"'Boivin, here is your man!'

"It was my friend's wife. Little Boivin appeared immediately on the threshold of a sort of barrack of plaster covered with zinc, that looked like a foot stove. He wore white duck trousers covered with stains and a dirty Panama hat.

"After shaking my hands warmly, he took me into what he called his garden. It was at the end of another alleyway enclosed by high walls and was a little square the size of a pocket handkerchief, surrounded by houses that were so high that the sun could reach it only two or three hours in the day. Pansies, pinks, wallflowers and a few rose bushes were languishing in this well without air, and hot as an oven from the refraction of heat from the roofs.

"'I have no trees,' said Boivin, 'but the neighbors' walls take their place. I have as much shade as in a wood.'

"Then he took hold of a button of my coat and said in a low tone:

"'You can do me a service. You saw the wife. She is not agreeable, eh? To-day, as I had invited you, she gave me clean clothes; but if I spot them all is lost. I counted on you to water my plants.'

"I agreed. I took off my coat, rolled up my sleeves, and began to work the handle of a kind of pump that wheezed, puffed and rattled like a consumptive as it emitted a thread of water like a Wallace drinking fountain. It took me ten minutes to water it and I was in a bath of perspiration. Boivin directed me:

"'Here—this plant—a little more; enough—now this one.'

"The watering pot leaked and my feet got more water than the flowers. The bottoms of my trousers were soaking and covered with mud. And twenty times running I kept it up, soaking my feet afresh each time, and perspiring anew as I worked the handle of the pump. And when I was tired out and wanted to stop, Boivin, in a tone of entreaty, said as he put his hand on my arm:

"'Just one more watering pot full—just one, and that will be all.'

"To thank me he gave me a rose, a big rose, but hardly had it touched my button-hole than it fell to pieces, leaving only a hard little green knot as a decoration. I was surprised, but said nothing.

"Mme. Boivin's voice was heard in the distance: 'Are you ever coming? When you know that luncheon is ready!'

"We went toward the foot stove. If the garden was in the shade, the house, on the other hand, was

in the blazing sun, and the sweating room in the Turkish bath is not as hot as was my friend's dining room.

"Three plates at the side of which were some half-washed forks, were placed on a table of yellow wood in the middle of which stood an earthenware dish containing boiled beef and potatoes. We began to eat.

"A large water bottle full of water lightly colored with wine attracted my attention. Boivin, embarrassed, said to his wife:

"'See here, my dear, just on a special occasion, are you not going to give us some plain wine?'

"She looked at him furiously.

"'So that you may both get tipsy, is that it, and stay here gabbing all day? A fig for your special occasion!'

"He said no more. After the stew she brought in another dish of potatoes cooked with bacon. When this dish was finished, still in silence, she announced:

"'That is all! Now get out!'

"Boivin looked at her in astonishment.

"'But the pigeon—the pigeon you plucked this morning?'

"She put her hands on her hips:

"'Perhaps you have not had enough? Because you bring people here is no reason why we should devour all that there is in the house. What is there for me to eat this evening?'

"We rose. Boivin whispered:

"'Wait for me a second, and we will skip.'

"He went into the kitchen where his wife had gone, and I overheard him say:

"'Give me twenty sous, my dear.'

"'What do you want with twenty sous?'

"'Why, one does not know what may happen. It is always better to have some money.'

"She yelled so that I should hear:

"'No, I will not give it to you! As the man has had luncheon here, the least he can do is to pay your expenses for the day.'

"Boivin came back to fetch me. As I wished to be polite I bowed to the mistress of the house, stammering:

"'Madame—many thanks—kind welcome.'

"'That's all right,' she replied. 'But do not bring him back drunk, for you will have to answer to me, you know!'

"We set out. We had to cross a perfectly bare plain under the burning sun. I attempted to gather a flower along the road and gave a cry of pain. It had hurt my hand frightfully. They call these plants nettles. And, everywhere, there was a smell of manure, enough to turn your stomach.

"Boivin said, 'Have a little patience and we will reach the river bank.'

"We reached the river. Here there was an odor of mud and dirty water, and the sun blazed down on the water so that it burned my eyes. I begged Boivin to go under cover somewhere. He took me into a kind of shanty filled with men, a river boatmen's tavern.

"He said:

"'This does not look very grand, but it is very comfortable.'

"I was hungry. I ordered an omelet. But lo and behold, at the second glass of wine, that beggar,

Boivin, lost his head, and I understand why his wife gave him water diluted.

"He got up, declaimed, wanted to show his strength, interfered in a quarrel between two drunken men who were fighting, and, but for the landlord, who came to the rescue, we should both have been killed.

"I dragged him away, holding him up until we reached the first bush where I deposited him. I lay down beside him and, it seems, I fell asleep. We must certainly have slept a long time, for it was dark when I awoke. Boivin was snoring at my side. I shook him; he rose but he was still drunk, though a little less so.

"We set out through the darkness across the plain. Boivin said he knew the way. He made me turn to the left, then to the right, then to the left. We could see neither sky nor earth, and found ourselves lost in the midst of a kind of forest of wooden stakes, that came as high as our noses. It was a vineyard and these were the supports. There was not a single light on the horizon. We wandered about in this vineyard for about an hour or two, hesitating, reaching out our arms without finding any limit, for we kept retracing our steps.

"At length Boivin fell against a stake that tore his cheek and he remained in a sitting posture on the ground, uttering with all his might long and resounding hallos, while I screamed 'Help! Help!' as loud as I could, lighting candle-matches to show the way to our rescuers, and also to keep up my courage.

"At last a belated peasant heard us and put us on our right road. I took Boivin to his home, but as

I was leaving him on the threshold of his garden, the door opened suddenly and his wife appeared, a candle in her hand. She frightened me horribly.

"As soon as she saw her husband, whom she must have been waiting for since dark, she screamed, as she darted toward me:

"'Ah, scoundrel, I knew you would bring him back drunk!'

"My, how I made my escape, running all the way to the station, and as I thought the fury was pursuing me I shut myself in an inner room as the train was not due for half an hour.

"That is why I never married, and why I never go out of Paris."

WAITER, A "BOCK"

WHY did I go into that beer hall on that particular evening? I do not know. It was cold; a fine rain, a flying mist, veiled the gas lamps with a transparent fog, made the sidewalks reflect the light that streamed from the shop windows, lighting up the soft slush and the muddy feet of the passers-by.

I was going nowhere in particular; was simply having a short walk after dinner. I had passed the Crédit Lyonnais, the Rue Vivienne, and several other streets. I suddenly descried a large beer hall which was more than half full. I walked inside, with no object in view. I was not the least thirsty.

I glanced round to find a place that was not too crowded, and went and sat down by the side of a man who seemed to me to be old, and who was smoking a two-sous clay pipe, which was as black as coal. From six to eight glasses piled up on the table in front of him indicated the number of "bocks" he had already absorbed. At a glance I recognized a "regular," one of those frequenters of beer houses who come in the morning when the place opens, and do not leave till evening when it is about to close. He was dirty, bald on top of his head, with a fringe of iron-gray hair falling on the collar of his frock coat. His clothes, much too large for him, appeared to have been made for him at a

time when he was corpulent. One could guess that he did not wear suspenders, for he could not take ten steps without having to stop to pull up his trousers. Did he wear a vest? The mere thought of his boots and of that which they covered filled me with horror. The frayed cuffs were perfectly black at the edges, as were his nails.

As soon as I had seated myself beside him, this individual said to me in a quiet tone of voice:

"How goes it?"

I turned sharply round and closely scanned his features, whereupon he continued:

"I see you do not recognize me."

"No, I do not."

"Des Barrets."

I was stupefied. It was Count Jean des Barrets, my old college chum.

I seized him by the hand, and was so dumbfounded that I could find nothing to say. At length I managed to stammer out:

"And you, how goes it with you?"

He responded placidly:

"I get along as I can."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"You see what I am doing," he answered quite resignedly.

I felt my face getting red. I insisted:

"But every day?"

"Every day it is the same thing," was his reply, accompanied with a thick puff of tobacco smoke.

He then tapped with a sou on the top of the marble table, to attract the attention of the waiter, and called out:

"Waiter, two 'bocks.'"

WAITER, A "BOCK"

A voice in the distance repeated:

"Two bocks for the fourth table."

Another voice, more distant still, shouted out: "Here they are!"

Immediately a man with a white apron appeared, carrying two "bocks," which he set down, foaming, on the table, spilling some of the yellow liquid on the sandy floor in his haste.

Des Barrets emptied his glass at a single draught and replaced it on the table, while he sucked in the foam that had been left on his mustache. He next asked:

"What is there new?"

I really had nothing new to tell him. I stammered:

"Nothing, old man. I am a business man."

In his monotonous tone of voice he said:

"Indeed, does it amuse you?"

"No, but what can I do? One must do something!"

"Why should one?"

"So as to have occupation."

"What's the use of an occupation? For my part, I do nothing at all, as you see, never anything. When one has not a sou I can understand why one should work. But when one has enough to live on, what's the use? What is the good of working? Do you work for yourself, or for others? If you work for yourself, you do it for your own amusement, which is all right; if you work for others, you are a fool."

Then, laying his pipe on the marble table, he called out anew:

"Waiter, a 'bock.'" And continued: "It makes

me thirsty to keep calling so. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. Yes, yes, I do nothing. I let things slide, and I am growing old. In dying I shall have nothing to regret. My only remembrance will be this beer hall. No wife, no children, no cares, no sorrows, nothing. That is best."

He then emptied the glass which had been brought him, passed his tongue over his lips, and resumed his pipe.

I looked at him in astonishment, and said:

"But you have not always been like that?"

"Pardon me; ever since I left college."

"That is not a proper life to lead, my dear fellow; it is simply horrible. Come, you must have something to do, you must love something, you must have friends."

"No, I get up at noon, I come here, I have my breakfast, I drink my beer, I remain until the evening, I have my dinner, I drink beer. Then about half-past one in the morning, I go home to bed, because the place closes up; that annoys me more than anything. In the last ten years I have passed fully six years on this bench, in my corner; and the other four in my bed, nowhere else. I sometimes chat with the regular customers."

"But when you came to Paris what did you do at first?"

"I paid my devoirs to the Café de Medicis."

"What next?"

"Next I crossed the water and came here."

"Why did you take that trouble?"

"What do you mean? One cannot remain all one's life in the Latin Quarter. The students make

too much noise. Now I shall not move again. Waiter, a 'bock.'"

I began to think that he was making fun of me, and I continued:

"Come now, be frank. You have been the victim of some great sorrow; some disappointment in love, no doubt! It is easy to see that you are a man who has had some trouble. What age are you?"

"I am thirty, but I look forty-five, at least."

I looked him straight in the face. His wrinkled, ill-shaven face gave one the impression that he was an old man. On the top of his head a few long hairs waved over a skin of doubtful cleanliness. He had enormous eyelashes, a heavy mustache, and a thick beard. Suddenly I had a kind of vision, I know not why, of a basin filled with dirty water in which all that hair had been washed. I said to him:

"You certainly look older than your age. You surely must have experienced some great sorrow."

He replied:

"I tell you that I have not. I am old because I never go out into the air. Nothing makes a man deteriorate more than the life of a café."

I still could not believe him.

"You must surely also have been married? One could not get as bald-headed as you are without having been in love."

He shook his head, shaking dandruff down on his coat as he did so.

"No, I have always been virtuous."

And, raising his eyes toward the chandelier which heated our heads, he said:

"If I am bald, it is the fault of the gas. It de-

stroys the hair. Waiter, a 'bock.' Are you not thirsty?"

"No, thank you. But you really interest me. Since when have you been so morbid? Your life is not normal, it is not natural. There is something beneath it all."

"Yes, and it dates from my infancy. I received a great shock when I was very young, and that turned my life into darkness which will last to the end."

"What was it?"

"You wish to know about it? Well, then, listen. You recall, of course, the castle in which I was brought up, for you used to spend five or six months there during vacation. You remember that large gray building, in the middle of a great park, and the long avenues of oaks which opened to the four points of the compass. You remember my father and mother, both of whom were ceremonious, solemn, and severe.

"I worshipped my mother; I was afraid of my father; but I respected both, accustomed always as I was to see every one bow before them. They were Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse to all the country round, and our neighbors, the Tannemares, the Ravelets, the Brennevilles, showed them the utmost consideration.

"I was then thirteen years old. I was happy, pleased with everything, as one is at that age, full of the joy of life.

"Well, toward the end of September, a few days before returning to college, as I was playing about in the shrubbery of the park, among the branches

and leaves, as I was crossing a path, I saw my father and mother, who were walking along.

"I recall it as though it were yesterday. It was a very windy day. The whole line of trees swayed beneath the gusts of wind, groaning, and seeming to utter cries—those dull, deep cries that forests give out during a tempest.

"The falling leaves, turning yellow, flew away like birds, circling and falling, and then running along the path like swift animals.

"Evening came on. It was dark in the thickets. The motion of the wind and of the branches excited me, made me tear about as if I were crazy, and howl in imitation of the wolves.

"As soon as I perceived my parents, I crept furtively toward them, under the branches, in order to surprise them, as though I had been a veritable prowler. But I stopped in fear a few paces from them. My father, who was in a terrible passion, cried:

"'Your mother is a fool; moreover, it is not a question of your mother. It is you. I tell you that I need this money, and I want you to sign this.'

"My mother replied in a firm voice:

"'I will not sign it. It is Jean's fortune. I shall guard it for him and I will not allow you to squander it with strange women, as you have your own heritage.'

"Then my father, trembling with rage, wheeled round and, seizing his wife by the throat, began to slap her with all his might full in the face with his disengaged hand.

"My mother's hat fell off, her hair became loosened and fell over her shoulders; she tried to

parry the blows, but she could not do so. And my father, like a madman, kept on striking her. My mother rolled over on the ground, covering her face with her hands. Then he turned her over on her back in order to slap her still more, pulling away her hands, which were covering her face.

"As for me, my friend, it seemed as though the world was coming to an end, that the eternal laws had changed. I experienced the overwhelming dread that one has in presence of things supernatural, in presence of irreparable disasters. My childish mind was bewildered, distracted. I began to cry with all my might, without knowing why; a prey to a fearful dread, sorrow, and astonishment. My father heard me, turned round, and, on seeing me, started toward me. I believe that he wanted to kill me, and I fled like a hunted animal, running straight ahead into the thicket.

"I ran perhaps for an hour, perhaps for two. I know not. Darkness set in. I sank on the grass, exhausted, and lay there dismayed, frantic with fear, and devoured by a sorrow capable of breaking forever the heart of a poor child. I was cold, hungry, perhaps. At length day broke. I was afraid to get up, to walk, to return home, to run farther, fearing to encounter my father, whom I did not wish to see again.

"I should probably have died of misery and of hunger at the foot of a tree if the park guard had not discovered me and led me home by force.

"I found my parents looking as usual. My mother alone spoke to me:

" 'How you frightened me, you naughty boy. I lay awake the whole night.'

"I did not answer, but began to weep. My father did not utter a single word.

"Eight days later I returned to school.

"Well, my friend, it was all over with me. I had witnessed the other side of things, the bad side. I have not been able to perceive the good side since that day. What has taken place in my mind, what strange phenomenon has warped my ideas, I do not know. But I no longer had a taste for anything, a wish for anything, a love for anybody, a desire for anything whatever, any ambition, or any hope. And I always see my poor mother on the ground, in the park, my father beating her. My mother died some years later; my father still lives. I have not seen him since. Waiter, a 'bock.'"

A waiter brought him his "bock," which he swallowed at a gulp. But, in taking up his pipe again, trembling as he was, he broke it. "Confound it!" he said, with a gesture of annoyance. "That is a real sorrow. It will take me a month to color another!"

And he called out across the vast hall, now reeking with smoke and full of men drinking, his everlasting: "Garçon, un 'bock'—and a new pipe."

CLAIR DE LUNE

ABBE MARIGNAN'S martial name suited him well. He was a tall, thin priest, fanatic, excitable, yet upright. All his beliefs were fixed, never varying. He believed sincerely that he knew his God, understood His plans, desires and intentions.

When he walked with long strides along the garden walk of his little country parsonage, he would sometimes ask himself the question: "Why has God done this?" And he would dwell on this continually, putting himself in the place of God, and he almost invariably found an answer. He would never have cried out in an outburst of pious humility: "Thy ways, O Lord, are past finding out."

He said to himself: "I am the servant of God; it is right for me to know the reason of His deeds, or to guess it if I do not know it."

Everything in nature seemed to him to have been created in accordance with an admirable and absolute logic. The "whys" and "becauses" always balanced. Dawn was given to make our awakening pleasant, the days to ripen the harvest, the rains to moisten it, the evenings for preparation for slumber, and the dark nights for sleep.

The four seasons corresponded perfectly to the needs of agriculture, and no suspicion had ever come to the priest of the fact that nature has no

intentions; that, on the contrary, everything which exists must conform to the hard demands of seasons, climates and matter.

But he hated woman—hated her unconsciously, and despised her by instinct. He often repeated the words of Christ: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he would add: "It seems as though God, Himself, were dissatisfied with this work of His." She was the tempter who led the first man astray, and who since then had ever been busy with her work of damnation, the feeble creature, dangerous and mysteriously affecting one. And even more than their sinful bodies, he hated their loving hearts.

He had often felt their tenderness directed toward himself, and though he knew that he was invulnerable, he grew angry at this need of love that is always vibrating in them.

According to his belief, God had created woman for the sole purpose of tempting and testing man. One must not approach her without defensive precautions and fear of possible snares. She was, indeed, just like a snare, with her lips open and her arms stretched out to man.

He had no indulgence except for nuns, whom their vows had rendered inoffensive; but he was stern with them, nevertheless, because he felt that at the bottom of their fettered and humble hearts the everlasting tenderness was burning brightly—that tenderness which was shown even to him, a priest.

He felt this cursed tenderness, even in their docility, in the low tones of their voices when speaking to him, in their lowered eyes, and in their resigned tears when he reproved them roughly. And he

would shake his cassock on leaving the convent doors, and walk off, lengthening his stride as though flying from danger.

He had a niece who lived with her mother in a little house near him. He was bent upon making a sister of charity of her.

She was a pretty, brainless madcap. When the abbé preached she laughed, and when he was angry with her she would give him a hug, drawing him to her heart, while he sought unconsciously to release himself from this embrace which nevertheless filled him with a sweet pleasure, awakening in his depths the sensation of paternity which slumbers in every man.

Often, when walking by her side, along the country road, he would speak to her of God, of his God. She never listened to him, but looked about her at the sky, the grass and flowers, and one could see the joy of life sparkling in her eyes. Sometimes she would dart forward to catch some flying creature, crying out as she brought it back: "Look, uncle, how pretty it is! I want to hug it!" And this desire to "hug" flies or lilac blossoms disquieted, angered, and roused the priest, who saw, even in this, the ineradicable tenderness that is always budding in women's hearts.

Then there came a day when the sexton's wife, who kept house for Abbé Marignan, told him, with caution, that his niece had a lover.

Almost suffocated by the fearful emotion this news roused in him, he stood there, his face covered with soap, for he was in the act of shaving.

When he had sufficiently recovered to think and speak, he cried: "It is not true; you lie, Mélanie!"

But the peasant woman put her hand on her heart, saying: "May our Lord judge me if I lie, Monsieur le Curé! I tell you, she goes there every night when your sister has gone to bed. They meet by the river side; you have only to go there and see, between ten o'clock and midnight."

He ceased scraping his chin, and began to walk up and down impetuously, as he always did when he was in deep thought. When he began shaving again he cut himself three times from his nose to his ear.

All day long he was silent, full of anger and indignation. To his priestly hatred of this invincible love was added the exasperation of her spiritual father, of her guardian and pastor, deceived and tricked by a child, and the selfish emotion shown by parents when their daughter announces that she has chosen a husband without them, and in spite of them.

After dinner he tried to read a little, but could not, growing more and more angry. When ten o'clock struck he seized his cane, a formidable oak stick, which he was accustomed to carry in his nocturnal walks when visiting the sick. And he smiled at the enormous club which he twirled in a threatening manner in his strong, country fist. Then he raised it suddenly and, gritting his teeth, brought it down on a chair, the broken back of which fell over on the floor.

He opened the door to go out, but stopped on the sill, surprised by the splendid moonlight, of such brilliance as is seldom seen.

And, as he was gifted with an emotional nature, one such as had all those poetic dreamers, the

Fathers of the Church, he felt suddenly distracted and moved by all the grand and serene beauty of this pale night.

In his little garden, all bathed in soft light, his fruit trees in a row cast on the ground the shadow of their slender branches, scarcely in full leaf, while the giant honeysuckle, clinging to the wall of his house, exhaled a delicious sweetness, filling the warm moonlit atmosphere with a kind of perfumed soul.

He began to take long breaths, drinking in the air as drunkards drink wine, and he walked along slowly, delighted, marveling, almost forgetting his niece.

As soon as he was outside of the garden, he stopped to gaze upon the plain all flooded with the caressing light, bathed in that tender, languishing charm of serene nights. At each moment was heard the short, metallic note of the cricket, and distant nightingales shook out their scattered notes —their light, vibrant music that sets one dreaming, without thinking, a music made for kisses, for the seduction of moonlight.

The abbé walked on again, his heart failing, though he knew not why. He seemed weakened, suddenly exhausted; he wanted to sit down, to rest there, to think, to admire God in His works.

Down yonder, following the undulations of the little river, a great line of poplars wound in and out. A fine mist, a white haze through which the moonbeams passed, silvering it and making it gleam, hung around and above the mountains, covering all the tortuous course of the water with a kind of light and transparent cotton.

The priest stopped once again, his soul filled with a growing and irresistible tenderness.

And a doubt, a vague feeling of disquiet came over him; he was asking one of those questions that he sometimes put to himself.

"Why did God make this? Since the night is destined for sleep, unconsciousness, repose, forgetfulness of everything, why make it more charming than day, softer than dawn or evening? And does why this seductive planet, more poetic than the sun, that seems destined, so discreet is it, to illuminate things too delicate and mysterious for the light of day, make the darkness so transparent?

"Why does not the greatest of feathered songsters sleep like the others? Why does it pour forth its voice in the mysterious night?

"Why this half-veil cast over the world? Why these tremblings of the heart, this emotion of the spirit, this enervation of the body? Why this display of enchantments that human beings do not see, since they are lying in their beds? For whom is destined this sublime spectacle, this abundance of poetry cast from heaven to earth?"

And the abbé could not understand.

But see, out there, on the edge of the meadow, under the arch of trees bathed in a shining mist, two figures are walking side by side.

The man was the taller, and held his arm about his sweetheart's neck and kissed her brow every little while. They imparted life, all at once, to the placid landscape in which they were framed as by a heavenly hand. The two seemed but a single being, the being for whom was destined this calm and silent night, and they came toward the priest

as a living answer, the response his Master sent to his questionings.

He stood still, his heart beating, all upset; and it seemed to him that he saw before him some biblical scene, like the loves of Ruth and Boaz, the accomplishment of the will of the Lord, in some of those glorious stories of which the sacred books tell. The verses of the Song of Songs began to ring in his ears, the appeal of passion, all the poetry of this poem replete with tenderness.

And he said unto himself: "Perhaps God has made such nights as these to idealize the love of men."

He shrank back from this couple that still advanced with arms intertwined. Yet it was his niece. But he asked himself now if he would not be disobeying God. And does not God permit love, since He surrounds it with such visible splendor?

And he went back musing, almost ashamed, as if he had intruded into a temple where he had no right to enter.

A SALE

THE defendants, Césaire-Isidore Brument and Prosper-Napoléon Cornu, appeared before the Court of Assizes of the Seine-Inférieure, on a charge of attempted murder, by drowning, of Mme. Brument, lawful wife of the first of the aforenamed.

The two prisoners sat side by side on the traditional bench. They were two peasants; the first was small and stout, with short arms, short legs, and a round head with a red pimply face, planted directly on his trunk, which was also round and short, and with apparently no neck. He was a raiser of pigs and lived at Cacheville-la-Goupil, in the district of Criquetot.

Cornu (Prosper-Napoléon) was thin, of medium height, with enormously long arms. His head was on crooked, his jaw awry, and he squinted. A blue blouse, as long as a shirt, hung down to his knees, and his yellow hair, which was scanty and plastered down on his head, gave his face a worn-out, dirty look, a dilapidated look that was frightful. He had been nicknamed "the curé" because he could imitate to perfection the chanting in church, and even the sound of the serpent. This talent attracted to his café—for he was a saloon keeper at Criquetot—a great many customers who preferred the "mass at Cornu" to the mass in church.

Mme. Brument, seated on the witness bench, was

a thin peasant woman who seemed to be always asleep. She sat there motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, gazing fixedly before her with a stupid expression.

The judge continued his interrogation.

"Well, then, Mme. Brument, they came into your house and threw you into a barrel full of water. Tell us the details. Stand up."

She rose. She looked as tall as a flag pole with her cap which looked like a white skull cap. She said in a drawling tone:

"I was shelling beans. Just then they came in. I said to myself, 'What is the matter with them? They do not seem natural, they seem up to some mischief.' They watched me sideways, like this, especially Cornu, because he squints. I do not like to see them together, for they are two good-for-nothings when they are in company. I said: 'What do you want with me?' They did not answer. I had a sort of mistrust——"

The defendant Brument interrupted the witness hastily, saying:

"I was full."

Then Cornu, turning towards his accomplice said in the deep tones of an organ:

"Say that we were both full, and you wil be telling no lie."

The judge, severely:

"You mean by that that you were both drunk?"

Brument: "There can be no question about it."

Cornu: "That might happen to anyone."

The Judge to the victim: "Continue your testimony, woman Brument."

"Well, Brument said to me, 'Do you wish to earn

a hundred sous?' 'Yes,' I replied, seeing that a hundred sous are not picked up in a horse's tracks. Then he said: 'Open your eyes and do as I do,' and he went to fetch the large empty barrel which is under the rain pipe in the corner, and he turned it over and brought it into my kitchen, and stuck it down in the middle of the floor, and then he said to me: 'Go and fetch water until it is full.'

"So I went to the pond with two pails and carried water, and still more water for an hour, seeing that the barrel was as large as a vat, saving your presence, m'sieu le président.

"All this time Brument and Cornu were drinking a glass, and then another glass, and then another. They were finishing their drinks when I said to them: 'You are full, fuller than this barrel.' And Brument answered me. 'Do not worry, go on with your work, your turn will come, each one has his share.' I paid no attention to what he said as he was full.

"When the barrel was full to the brim, I said: 'There, that's done.'

"And then Cornu gave me a hundred sous, not Brument, Cornu; it was Cornu gave them to me. And Brument said: 'Do you wish to earn a hundred sous more?' 'Yes,' I said, for I am not accustomed to presents like that. Then he said: 'Take off your clothes.'

"'Take off my clothes?'

"'Yes,' he said.

"'How many shall I take off?'

"'If it worries you at all, keep on your chemise, that won't bother us.'

"A hundred sous is a hundred sous, and I have

to undress myself; but I did not fancy undressing before those two good-for-nothings. I took off my cap, and then my jacket, and then my skirt, and then my sabots. Brument said, 'Keep on your stockings, also; we are good fellows.'

"And Cornu said, too, 'We are good fellows.'

"So there I was, almost like mother Eve. And they got up from their chairs, but could not stand straight, they were so full, saving your presence, M'sieu le président.

"I said to myself: 'What are they up to?'

"And Brument said: 'Are you ready?'

"And Cornu said: 'I'm ready!'

"And then they took me, Brument by the head, and Cornu by the feet, as one might take, for instance, a sheet that has been washed. Then I began to bawl.

"And Brument said: 'Keep still, wretched creature!'

"And they lifted me up in the air and put me into the barrel, which was full of water, so that I had a check of the circulation, a chill to my very insides.

"And Brument said: 'Is that all?'

"Cornu said: 'That is all.'

"Brument said: 'The head is not in, that will make a difference in the measure.'

"Cornu said: 'Put in her head.'

"And then Brument pushed down my head as if to drown me, so that the water ran into my nose, so that I could already see Paradise. And he pushed it down, and I disappeared.

"And then he must have been frightened. He pulled me out and said: 'Go and get dry, carcass.'

"As for me, I took to my heels and ran as far as M. le curé's. He lent me a skirt belonging to his servant, for I was almost in a state of nature, and he went to fetch Maître Chicot, the country watchman who went to Criquetot to fetch the police who came to my house with me.

"Then we found Brument and Cornu fighting each other like two rams.

"Brument was bawling: 'It isn't true, I tell you that there is at least a cubic metre in it. It is the method that was no good.'

"Cornu bawled: 'Four pails, that is almost half a cubic metre. You need not reply, that's what it is.'

"The police captain put them both under arrest. I have no more to tell."

She sat down. The audience in the court room laughed. The jurors looked at one another in astonishment. The Judge said:

"Defendant Cornu, you seem to have been the instigator of this infamous plot. What have you to say?"

And Cornu rose in his turn.

"Judge," he replied, "I was full."

The Judge answered gravely:

"I know it. Proceed."

"I will. Well, Brument came to my place about nine o'clock, and ordered two drinks, and said: 'There's one for you, Cornu.' I sat down opposite him and drank, and out of politeness, I offered him a glass. Then he returned the compliment and so did I, and so it went on from glass to glass until noon, when we were full.

"Then Brument began to cry. That touched me. I asked him what was the matter. He said: 'I

must have a thousand francs by Thursday.' That cooled me off a little, you understand. Then he said to me all at once: 'I will sell you my wife.'

"I was full, and I was a widower. You understand, that stirred me up. I did not know his wife, but she was a woman, wasn't she? I asked him: 'How much would you sell her for?'

"He reflected, or pretended to reflect. When one is full one is not very clear-headed, and he replied: 'I will sell her by the cubic metre.'

"That did not surprise me, for I was as drunk as he was, and I knew what a cubic metre is in my business. It is a thousand litres, that suited me.

"But the price remained to be settled. All depends on the quality. I said: 'How much do you want a cubic metre?'

"He answered: 'Two thousand francs.'

"I gave a bound like a rabbit, and then I reflected that a woman ought not to measure more than three hundred litres. So I said: 'That's too dear.'

"He answered: 'I cannot do it for less. I should lose by it.'

"You understand, one is not a dealer in hogs for nothing. One understands one's business. But if he is smart, the seller of bacon, I am smarter, seeing that I sell them also. Ha, Ha, Ha! So I said to him: 'If she were new, I would not say anything, but she has been married to you for some time, so she is not as fresh as she was. I will give you fifteen hundred francs a cubic metre, not a sou more. Will that suit you?'

"He answered: 'That will do. That's a bargain!'

"I agreed, and we started out, arm in arm. We must help each other in this world.

"But a fear came to me: 'How can you measure her unless you put her into the liquid?'

"Then he explained his idea, not without difficulty for he was full. He said to me: 'I take a barrel, and fill it with water to the brim. I put her in it. All the water that comes out we will measure, that is the way to fix it.'

"I said: 'I see, I understand. But this water that overflows will run away; how are you going to gather it up?'

"Then he began stuffing me and explained to me that all we should have to do would be to refill the barrel with the water his wife had displaced as soon as she should have left. All the water we should pour in would be the measure. I supposed about ten pails; that would be a cubic metre. He isn't a fool, all the same, when he is drunk, that old horse.

"To be brief, we reached his house and I took a look at its mistress. A beautiful woman she certainly was not. Anyone can see her, for there she is. I said to myself: 'I am disappointed, but never mind, she will be of value; handsome or ugly, it is all the same, is it not, monsieur le président?' And then I saw that she was as thin as a rail. I said to myself: 'She will not measure four hundred litres.' I understand the matter, it being in liquids.

"She told you about the proceeding. I even let her keep on her chemise and stockings, to my own disadvantage.

"When that was done she ran away. I said: 'Look out, Brument! she is escaping.'

"He replied: 'Do not be afraid, I will catch

her all right. She will have to come back to sleep. I will measure the deficit.'

"We measured. Not four pailfuls. Ha, Ha, Ha!"

The witness began to laugh so persistently that a gendarme was obliged to punch him in the back. Having quieted down, he resumed:

"In short, Brument exclaimed: 'Nothing doing, that is not enough.' I bawled and bawled, and bawled again, he punched me, I hit back. That would have kept on till the Day of Judgment, seeing we were both drunk.

"Then came the gendarmes! They swore at us, they took us off to prison. I want damages."

He sat down.

Brument confirmed in every particular the statements of his accomplice. The jury, in consternation, retired to deliberate.

At the end of an hour they returned a verdict of acquittal for the defendants, with some severe strictures on the dignity of marriage, and establishing the precise limitations of business transactions.

Brument went home to the domestic roof accompanied by his wife.

Cornu went back to his business.

THE IMPOLITE SEX

Madame de X. to Madame de L.

ÉTRETAT, Friday.

MY DEAR AUNT:

I am coming to see you without anyone knowing it. I shall be at Les Fresnes on the 2d of September, the day before the hunting season opens, as I do not want to miss it, so that I may tease these gentlemen. You are too good, aunt, and you will allow them, as you usually do when there are no strange guests, to come to table, under pretext of fatigue, without dressing or shaving for the occasion.

They are delighted, of course, when I am not present. But I shall be there and will hold a review, like a general, at dinner time; and, if I find a single one of them at all careless in dress, no matter how little, I mean to send them down to the kitchen with the servants.

The men of to-day have so little consideration for others and so little good manners that one must be always severe with them. We live indeed in an age of vulgarity. When they quarrel, they insult each other in terms worthy of longshoremen, and, in our presence, they do not conduct themselves even as well as our servants. It is at the seaside that you see this most clearly. They are to be found there in bat-

talions, and you can judge them in the lump. Oh! what coarse beings they are!

Just imagine, in a train, a gentleman who looked well, as I thought at first sight, thanks to his tailor, carefully took off his boots in order to put on a pair of old shoes! Another, an old man who was probably some wealthy upstart (these are the most ill-bred), while sitting opposite to me, had the delicacy to place his two feet on the seat quite close to me. This is a positive fact.

At the watering-places the vulgarity is unrestrained. I must here make one admission—that my indignation is perhaps due to the fact that I am not accustomed to associate, as a rule, with the sort of people one comes across here, for I should be less shocked by their manners if I had the opportunity of observing them oftener. In the office of the hotel I was nearly thrown down by a young man who snatched the key over my head. Another knocked against me so violently without begging my pardon or lifting his hat, coming away from a ball at the Casino, that it gave me a pain in the chest. It is the same way with all of them. Watch them addressing ladies on the terrace; they scarcely ever bow. They merely raise their hands to their headgear. But, indeed, as they are all more or less bald, it is the best plan.

But what exasperates and disgusts me particularly is the liberty they take of talking in public, without any kind of precaution, about the most revolting adventures. When two men are together, they relate to each other, in the broadest language and with the most abominable comments really hor-

rible stories, without caring in the slightest degree whether a woman's ear is within reach of their voices. Yesterday, on the beach, I was forced to leave the place where I was sitting in order not to be any longer the involuntary confidante of an obscene anecdote, told in such immodest language that I felt just as humiliated as indignant at having heard it. Would not the most elementary good-breeding teach them to speak in a lower tone about such matters when we are near at hand. Étretat is, moreover, the country of gossip and scandal. From five to seven o'clock you can see people wandering about in quest of scandal, which they retail from group to group. As you remarked to me, my dear aunt, tittle-tattle is the mark of petty individuals and petty minds. It is also the consolation of women who are no longer loved or sought after. It is enough for me to observe the women who are fondest of gossiping to be persuaded that you are quite right.

The other day I was present at a musical evening at the Casino, given by a remarkable artist, Madame Masson, who sings in a truly delightful manner. I took the opportunity of applauding the admirable Coquelin, as well as two charming vaudeville performers, M—— and Meillet. I met, on this occasion, all the bathers who were at the beach. It is no great distinction this year.

Next day I went to lunch at Yport. I noticed a tall man with a beard, coming out of a large house like a castle. It was the painter, Jean Paul Laurens. He is not satisfied apparently with imprisoning the subjects of his pictures, he insists on imprisoning himself.

Then I found myself seated on the shingle close to a man still young, of gentle and refined appearance, who was reading poetry. But he read it with such concentration, with such passion, I may say, that he did not even raise his eyes towards me. I was somewhat astonished and asked the proprietor of the baths, without appearing to be much concerned, the name of this gentleman. I laughed to myself a little at this reader of rhymes; he seemed behind the age, for a man. This person, I thought, must be a simpleton. Well, aunt, I am now infatuated about this stranger. Just fancy, his name is Sully Prudhomme! I went back and sat down beside him again so as to get a good look at him. His face has an expression of calmness and of penetration. Somebody came to look for him, and I heard his voice, which is sweet and almost timid. He would certainly not tell obscene stories aloud in public or knock up against ladies without apologizing. He is assuredly a man of refinement, but his refinement is of an almost morbid, sensitive character. I will try this winter to get an introduction to him.

I have no more news, my dear aunt, and I must finish this letter in haste, as the mail will soon close. I kiss your hands and your cheeks. Your devoted niece, BERTHE DE X.

P. S.—I should add, however, by way of justification of French politeness, that our fellow-countrymen are, when travelling, models of good manners in comparison with the abominable English, who seem to have been brought up in a stable, so careful are they not to discommode themselves in any way, while they always discommode their neighbors.

THE IMPOLITE SEX

Madame de L. to Madame de X.

Les Fresnes, Saturday.

My Dear Child:

Many of the things you have said to me are very sensible, but that does not prevent you from being wrong. Like you, I used formerly to feel very indignant at the impoliteness of men, who, as I supposed, constantly treated me with neglect; but, as I grew older and reflected on everything, putting aside coquetry, and observing things without taking any part in them myself, I perceived this much—that if men are not always polite, women are always indescribably rude.

We imagine that we should be permitted to do anything, my darling, and at the same time we consider that we have a right to the utmost respect, and in the most flagrant manner we commit actions devoid of that elementary good-breeding of which you speak so feelingly.

I find, on the contrary, that men consider us much more than we consider them. Besides, darling, men must needs be, and are, what we make them. In a state of society, where women are all true gentlewomen, all men would become gentlemen.

Come now; just observe and reflect.

Look at two women meeting in the street. What an attitude each assumes towards the other! What disparaging looks! What contempt they throw into each glance! How they toss their heads while they inspect each other to find something to condemn! And, if the footpath is narrow, do you think one woman would make room for another, or would beg pardon as she sweeps by? Never! When two men

jostle each other by accident in some narrow lane, each of them bows and at the same time gets out of the other's way, while we women press against each other stomach to stomach, face to face, insolently staring each other out of countenance.

Look at two women who are acquaintances meeting on a staircase outside the door of a friend's drawing-room, one of them just leaving, the other about to go in. They begin to talk to each other and block up all the landing. If anyone happens to be coming up behind them, man or woman, do you imagine that they will put themselves half an inch out of their way? Never! never!

I was waiting myself, with my watch in my hands, one day last winter at a certain drawing-room door. And, behind me, two gentlemen were also waiting without showing any readiness, as I did, to lose their temper. The reason was that they had long grown accustomed to our unconscionable insolence.

The other day, before leaving Paris, I went to dine with no less a person than your husband, in the Champs Elysées, in order to enjoy the fresh air. Every table was occupied. The waiter asked us to wait and there would soon be a vacant table.

At that moment I noticed an elderly lady of noble figure, who, having paid for her dinner, seemed on the point of going away. She saw me, scanned me from head to foot, and did not budge. For more than a quarter of an hour she sat there, immovable, putting on her gloves, and calmly staring at those who were waiting like myself. Now, two young men who were just finishing their dinner, having seen me in their turn, hastily summoned the waiter, paid what they owed, and at once offered me their seats, even

insisting on standing while waiting for their change. And, bear in mind, my fair niece, that I am no longer pretty, like you, but old and white-haired.

It is we, you see, who should be taught politeness, and the task would be such a difficult one that Hercules himself would not be equal to it. You speak to me about Étretat and about the people who indulged in "tittle-tattle" along the beach of that delightful watering-place. It is a spot now lost to me, a thing of the past, but I found much amusement there in days gone by.

There were only a few of us, people in good society, really good society, and a few artists, and we all fraternized. We paid little attention to gossip in those days.

As we had no monotonous Casino, where people only gather for show, where they whisper, where they dance stupidly, where they succeed in thoroughly boring one another, we sought some other way of passing our evenings pleasantly. Now, just guess what came into the head of one of our husbands? Nothing less than to go and dance each night in one of the farm-houses in the neighborhood.

We started out in a group with a street-organ, generally played by Le Poittevin, the painter, with a cotton nightcap on his head. Two men carried lanterns. We followed in procession, laughing and chattering like a pack of fools.

We woke up the former and his servant-maids and farm hands. We got them to make onion soup (horror!), and we danced under the apple trees, to the sound of the barrel-organ. The cocks waking up began to crow in the darkness of the out-houses;

the horses began prancing on the straw of their stables. The cool air of the country caressed our cheeks with the smell of grass and of new-mown hay.

How long ago it is! How long ago it is! It is thirty years since then!

I do not want you, my darling, to come for the opening of the hunting season. Why spoil the pleasure of our friends by inflicting on them fashionable toilettes on this day of vigorous exercise in the country? This is the way, child, that men are spoiled. I embrace you. Your old aunt,

GENEVIÉVE DE Z.

A WEDDING GIFT

FOR a long time Jacques Bourdillère had sworn that he would never marry, but he suddenly changed his mind. It happened suddenly, one summer, at the seashore.

One morning as he lay stretched out on the sand, watching the women coming out of the water, a little foot had struck him by its neatness and daintiness. He raised his eyes and was delighted with the whole person, although in fact he could see nothing but the ankles and the head emerging from a flannel bath-robe carefully held closed. He was supposed to be sensual and a fast liver. It was therefore by the mere grace of the form that he was at first captured. Then he was held by the charm of the young girl's sweet mind, so simple and good, as fresh as her cheeks and lips.

He was presented to the family and pleased them. He immediately fell madly in love. When he saw Berthe Lannis in the distance, on the long yellow stretch of sand, he would tingle to the roots of his hair. When he was near her he would become silent, unable to speak or even to think, with a kind of throbbing at his heart, and a buzzing in his ears, and a bewilderment in his mind. Was that love?

He did not know or understand, but he had fully decided to have this child for his wife.

Her parents hesitated for a long time, restrained

by the young man's bad reputation. It was said that he had an old sweetheart, one of these binding attachments which one always believes to be broken off and yet which always hold.

Besides, for a shorter or longer period, he loved every woman who came within reach of his lips.

Then he settled down and refused, even once, to see the one with whom he had lived for so long. A friend took care of this woman's pension and assured her an income. Jacques paid, but he did not even wish to hear of her, pretending even to ignore her name. She wrote him letters which he never opened. Every week he would recognize the clumsy writing of the abandoned woman, and every week a greater anger surged within him against her, and he would quickly tear the envelope and the paper, without opening it, without reading one single line, knowing in advance the reproaches and complaints which it contained.

As no one had much faith in his constancy, the test was prolonged through the winter, and Berthe's hand was not granted him until the spring. The wedding took place in Paris at the beginning of May.

The young couple had decided not to take the conventional wedding trip, but after a little dance for the younger cousins, which would not be prolonged after eleven o'clock, in order that this day of lengthy ceremonies might not be too tiresome, the young pair were to spend the first night in the parental home and then, on the following morning, to leave for the beach so dear to their hearts, where they had first known and loved each other.

Night had come, and the dance was going on in the large parlor. The two had retired into a little

A WEDDING GIFT

Japanese boudoir hung with bright silks and dimly lighted by the soft rays of a large colored lantern hanging from the ceiling like a gigantic egg. Through the open window the fresh air from outside passed over their faces like a caress, for the night was warm and calm, full of the odor of spring.

They were silent, holding each other's hands and from time to time squeezing them with all their might. She sat there with a dreamy look, feeling a little lost at this great change in her life, but smiling, moved, ready to cry, often also almost ready to faint from joy, believing the whole world to be changed by what had just happened to her, uneasy, she knew not why, and feeling her whole body and soul filled with an indefinable and delicious lassitude.

He was looking at her persistently with a fixed smile. He wished to speak, but found nothing to say, and so sat there, expressing all his ardor by pressures of the hand. From time to time he would murmur: "Berthe!" And each time she would raise her eyes to him with a look of tenderness; they would look at each other for a second and then her look, pierced and fascinated by his, would fall.

They found no thoughts to exchange. They had been left alone, but occasionally some of the dancers would cast a rapid glance at them, as though they were the discreet and trusty witnesses of a mystery.

A door opened and a servant entered, holding on a tray a letter which a messenger had just brought. Jacques, trembling, took this paper, overwhelmed by a vague and sudden fear, the mysterious terror of swift misfortune.

He looked for a long time at the envelope, the writing on which he did not know, not daring to

open it, not wishing to read it, with a wild desire to put it in his pocket and say to himself: "I'll leave that till to-morrow, when I'm far away!" But on one corner two big words, underlined, "*Very urgent,*" filled him with terror. Saying, "Please excuse me, my dear," he tore open the envelope. He read the paper, grew frightfully pale, looked over it again, and, slowly, he seemed to spell it out word for word.

When he raised his head his whole expression showed how upset he was. He stammered: "My dear, it's—it's from my best friend, who has had a very great misfortune. He has need of me immediately—for a matter of life or death. Will you excuse me if I leave you for half an hour? I'll be right back."

Trembling and dazed, she stammered: "Go, my dear!" not having been his wife long enough to dare to question him, to demand to know. He disappeared. She remained alone, listening to the dancing in the neighboring parlor.

He had seized the first hat and coat he came to and rushed downstairs three steps at a time. As he was emerging into the street he stopped under the gas-jet of the vestibule and reread the letter. This is what it said:

SIR: A girl by the name of Ravet, an old sweetheart of yours, it seems, has just given birth to a child that she says is yours. The mother is about to die and is begging for you. I take the liberty to write and ask you if you can grant this last request to a woman who seems to be very unhappy and worthy of pity. Yours truly,

DR. BONNARD.

When he reached the sick-room the woman was already on the point of death. He did not recognize her at first. The doctor and two nurses were taking

care of her. And everywhere on the floor were pails full of ice and rags covered with blood. Water flooded the carpet; two candles were burning on a bureau; behind the bed, in a little wicker crib, the child was crying, and each time it would moan the mother, in torture, would try to move, shivering under her ice bandages.

She was mortally wounded, killed by this birth. Her life was flowing from her, and, notwithstanding the ice and the care, the merciless hemorrhage continued, hastening her last hour.

She recognized Jacques and wished to raise her arms. They were so weak that she could not do so, but tears coursed down her pallid cheeks.

He dropped to his knees beside the bed, seized one of her hands and kissed it frantically. Then, little by little, he drew close to the thin face, which started at the contact. One of the nurses was lighting them with a candle, and the doctor was watching them from the back of the room.

Then she said in a voice which sounded as though it came from a distance: "I am going to die, dear. Promise to stay to the end. Oh! don't leave me now. Don't leave me in my last moments!"

He kissed her face and her hair, and, weeping, he murmured: "Do not be uneasy; I will stay."

It was several minutes before she could speak again, she was so weak. She continued: "The little one is yours. I swear it before God and on my soul. I swear it as I am dying! I have never loved another man but you—promise to take care of the child."

He was trying to take this poor pain-racked body in his arms. Maddened by remorse and sorrow, he

stammered: "I swear to you that I will bring him up and love him. He shall never leave me."

Then she tried to kiss Jacques. Powerless to lift her head, she held out her white lips in an appeal for a kiss. He approached his lips to respond to this piteous entreaty.

As soon as she felt a little calmer, she murmured: "Bring him here and let me see if you love him."

He went and got the child. He placed him gently on the bed between them, and the little one stopped crying. She murmured: "Don't move any more!" And he was quiet. And he stayed there, holding in his burning hand this other hand shaking in the chill of death, just as, a while ago, he had been holding a hand trembling with love. From time to time he would cast a quick glance at the clock, which marked midnight, then one o'clock, then two.

The physician had returned. The two nurses, after noiselessly moving about the room for a while, were now sleeping on chairs. The child was asleep, and the mother, with eyes shut, appeared also to be resting.

Suddenly, just as pale daylight was creeping in behind the curtains, she stretched out her arms with such a quick and violent motion that she almost threw her baby on the floor. A kind of rattle was heard in her throat, then she lay on her back motionless, dead.

The nurses sprang forward and declared: "All is over!"

He looked once more at this woman whom he had so loved, then at the clock, which pointed to four, and he ran away, forgetting his overcoat, in the evening dress, with the child in his arms.

A WEDDING GIFT

After he had left her alone the young wife had waited, calmly enough at first, in the little Japanese boudoir. Then, as she did not see him return, she went back to the parlor with an indifferent and calm appearance, but terribly anxious. When her mother saw her alone she asked: "Where is your husband?" She answered: "In his room; he is coming right back."

After an hour, when everybody had questioned her, she told about the letter, Jacques' upset appearance and her fears of an accident.

Still they waited. The guests left; only the nearest relatives remained. At midnight the bride was put to bed, sobbing bitterly. Her mother and two aunts, sitting around the bed, listened to her crying, silent and in despair. The father had gone to the commissary of police to see if he could obtain some news.

At five o'clock a slight noise was heard in the hall. A door was softly opened and closed. Then suddenly a little cry like the mewing of a cat was heard throughout the silent house.

All the women started forward and Berthe sprang ahead of them all, pushing her way past her aunts, wrapped in a bathrobe.

Jacques stood in the middle of the room, pale and out of breath, holding an infant in his arms. The four women looked at him, astonished; but Berthe, who had suddenly become courageous, rushed forward with anguish in her heart, exclaiming: "What is it? What's the matter?"

He looked about him wildly and answered shortly: "I—I have a child and the mother has just died."

And with his clumsy hands he held out the screaming infant.

Without saying a word, Berthe seized the child, kissed it and hugged it to her. Then she raised her tear-filled eyes to him, asking: "Did you say that the mother was dead?" He answered: "Yes—just now—in my arms. I had broken with her since summer. I knew nothing. The physician sent for me."

Then Berthe murmured: "Well, we will bring up the little one."

Date Due			
FEB 18 '54			
OCT 31 '58			
FEB 5 '65			

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